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HARTAS MATURIN

BY H. F. LESTER,

*Author of "Under Two Fig-Trees," "Ben D'Ymion," and other
Novelettes.*

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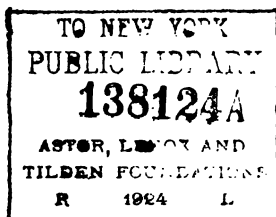
"I brood on all the shapes I must attain
Before I reach the Perfect, which is God."

—ALDRICH.

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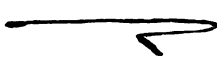
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HARTAS MATURIN.

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"Talking about murders, will anybody care to marry a doctor after reading H. F. Lester's new novel, 'Hartas Maturin.' So many people asked me if I had read 'Hartas,' that I concluded to risk my peaceful slumbers by its perusal. I have read many theosophic novels; but, upon my word, "Hartas Maturin" is by far the cleverest and most impressive of them all. It is a singularly vivid and enthralling story; and it has the merit, besides, of being distinctly moral in its tone."—LOUISE CHANDLER MOULTON, in the *Boston Sunday Herald*.

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HARTAS MATURIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE OBSTACLE TO LIGHT.

PEOPLE who admired Dr. Hartas Maturin admired him exceedingly. He had many devotees, especially among women. It was said that he was ambitious, and it was darkly hinted that he aspired to represent the northern district of the Metropolitan area, in which he resided, in Parliament; but there was no doubt whatever of his being a most philanthropic man, and the object of universal respect. His riches, of which also there existed no doubt at all, may have accounted for some of this popular appreciation. A handsome, pleasant, well-mannered possessor of a fine house and hospitable tastes is always tolerably sure to command the good-will of his friends and acquaintances; and Dr. Maturin was more than liked—he was, generally speaking, adored.

Yet he was quite a young man, not more than five and twenty at most, and had only settled down in Manor End two years before. Very little was known about him, beyond the fact that he had a beautiful young wife, that he was rich, and that he had taken up medicine more as a pastime than as the serious occupation of life. What he chiefly devoted himself to was the forwarding of nearly every scheme of helping the poor and helpless which happened to be started in his neighborhood. He did this not only by liberal donations, but by appearing constantly on public platforms where these plans were being advocated. In a very short time after he had come to live in the place, everybody knew that Dr. Maturin was the man to go to if some benevolent institution needed support, or some wretched outcast wanted

food and shelter. Yet it was noticed that he made strange exceptions in his charities. Those which were merely practical, and had no sentimental and picturesque side, received less commendation and favor than those which appealed in some striking way to the unreasoning instinct of humanity. And it did not answer to ply the doctor with too many sickening details of disease or destitution; these disgusted him, and cooled his philanthropy. He gave lavishly to rescue poor children or ill-treated women from bad homes or gnawing want; but men seemed to attract his sympathies much less.

It is curious that the expression, "a great man," is sometimes applied to one whose name is unknown outside a narrow circle; who, besides, has never done anything conspicuous or heroic in his life. Dr. Maturin was spoken of by those who admired him as a great man. Yet, if he was great at all, it was because of qualities rather guessed at than actually recognized by those who eulogized him, and which, had they been known, would have caused wise men to dread rather than praise him.

The house to which Dr. Maturin had brought his wife shortly after their marriage was in the main road. It was one of the spacious, old-fashioned residences which still exist in the suburbs of London, and which are in striking contrast to the neat small terraces which spring up on all sides of them. It stood back from the road, and a high wall separated the gravel drive up to the front door and the half circle of shrubbery from the view of passers-by. There was a large garden at the back, with well-planned green-houses, a couple of lawns, and several acres of meadow and fruit-trees. But though the house stood on the main road, it also was at a corner, for a lane ending in some distant brickfields ran between it and its next-door neighbor. Dr. Maturin had added a small two-storied wing on this side, and a gate opening directly on to the lane led by a short gravel path up to his consulting-room, where he saw patients. The wing, in fact, made the professional part of his house, and consisted of four rooms. There was, on the right of the passage, the door of the consulting-room itself; Dr. Maturin called it his "laboratory" as well, and a large cupboard with a stained-glass door to it concealed the bottles, tubes, and other appliances which are usually associated with the name "laboratory." On the left was a waiting-room. Above was a

chamber furnished as a bedroom, in case of necessity, and another quite empty and devoid even of a carpet. Into these rooms he allowed none of his domestics to enter, except for cleaning purposes. This part of the house was sacred to the doctor's professional avocations.

There was an almost venerable air about the consulting-room, imparted to it by some antique furniture. A large oaken book-case and a ponderous oak chest, both profusely decorated with carvings and both black with age, stood against two walls. Then there was a massive carved chair, fit for an abbot to take his ease in; some hideous dog-faces on the arms and legs wore a petrified snarl. Even in daytime the room was dark; at night, with the flickering firelight, these worm-eaten pieces of furniture gave it a still more sombre aspect.

As for the road itself, at that time—years ago—it only dimly foreshadowed what it has since become. Being one of the main routes leading northward from London, there was always a fair amount of traffic passing; but no tram line had been formed, or so much as imagined, along its centre; and here and there on each side there were patches of green, separated from the road by palings, the remnants of large fields, and looking disconsolate enough at the prospect of being speedily built over. One of the best features of the place was the abundance of fine old trees which overhung the pavement; for there were numerous mansions standing back from the road, with carriage drives and gardens in front. Now the rows of shops have dispossessed most of these houses. Manor End, then a suburb, has been incorporated in the ever-advancing Metropolis. The old almshouses, with their antique chimneys and low roofs, look to-day out of place amid their very modern surroundings of shops with plate-glass windows and stuccoed terraces of lofty private residences. Even then it was fairly obvious that, in the absence of any social or physical convulsion, the old straggling town must soon be merged in London. Behind the main road the “night-mare of little houses” was already beginning.

Now, Dr. Maturin, besides being a philanthropic man, was an observant one as well. He had seen the gradual process of deruralizing his townlet going on, and, casting his glance into the future, had without difficulty imagined to himself what *Manor End* would resemble twenty or thirty years

ahead—what it resembles now, in fact. He had consequently done his best to impress on the inhabitants of the place the need of saving something green, something pleasant and open, out of the imminent wreck. And the subject of the steady advance of “General London” was one that was well known in local circles.

Naturally enough, there were many who felt a quiet envy of the rich, fortunate doctor. Those who had watched him one October afternoon, sitting in his consulting-room over a small fire burning in the grate, would have seen some reason to doubt if he was really enviable. Some unpleasant thought was evidently in his mind. The handsome, clear-cut features did not reveal it, nor the olive hue of the complexion; but there was the ghost of a frown puckering the forehead over the eyes, and the eyes themselves seemed restless and expressive of discontent.

“I must try her again,” he said, half to himself, as he rose from his chair and walked slowly to the door. “What a nuisance, to be sure!”

He went out into the passage, which terminated at one end in the door leading towards the lane, at which patients knocked. At the other end there was another door, communicating with the living-rooms of the house. This was locked, but the doctor unfastened it. He passed through into the cheerful and carpeted hall, which seemed particularly warm and bright after the dull room he had left. Great flower and fern troughs were ranged on each side; the fronds, stirred by the air, seemed to wave a welcome to him as he passed by. He stepped into the pretty drawing-room looking on to the lawn, where he heard his wife singing.

“Janet,” he said, throwing himself on to an ottoman close to the piano, “I want to speak to you again about that five thousand pounds. I don’t want to bore you, dear.”

Mrs. Maturin had stopped her playing, and wheeled round with a smile of welcome to meet her husband. The smile died out at once when she heard his words, and she gave a little shudder.

“I think you don’t clearly understand,” he went on, “how really essential it is for me to have that amount at my command. Both from the standpoint of philanthropy and—and policy, I am sure the park project is a good one. Wood, who is safe to stand against me if I put up for Parliament at next *election*, has already given a thousand pounds. He has been

tremendously praised all round. To put it vulgarly, I must cut him out."

Janet Maturin rose from her music-stool and went to the window. She said nothing. A person standing on the gravel walk between the house and the lawn would have seen that her pretty blue eyes were filled with tears. She had never expected her husband to be quite like this when she married him.

"I saw Uncle George to-day," she replied indirectly.

"Ah!" The information did not seem to afford her husband much pleasure. "You did not breathe a word about my affairs to *him*?" As a matter of fact, Dr. Maturin thought it most probable that Janet had done so. He had discovered long ago that his wife was not good at keeping secrets; she had an open and thoughtless spirit, no more able to contain what was in her mind than a bird can prevent itself from singing in its natural tones.

This want of powers of concealment in his wife had long been a deep grievance with the doctor. It was a barrier to confidence. It had driven him to keep from her everything that he could. It was impossible, however, to prevent her from knowing the fact that he wanted some of the ample dowry settled upon herself at her marriage, for her consent, as well as that of her trustees, was necessary to obtain it. He had made the mistake of supposing that Janet would, like most women, be ambitious enough to second her husband eagerly in his attempt to reach a seat in Parliament, an undeniable distinction in those days. It was a matter of genuine surprise that she had failed to respond enthusiastically. She would have liked to see her husband, of whom she was exceedingly proud, in a position worthy of his talents, but she utterly disliked the idea of climbing to that elevation by giving part of a park to the public. "It looks like bribing people, dear," she had said. Dr. Maturin had not forgotten the remark.

"I told him what you wanted the money for, Hartas," she said simply.

"What! Surely not the parliamentary part?" Dr. Maturin was genuinely surprised. He had not expected her to be quite such a marplot as that.

"I did not know you wished me to keep anything back," she replied, with some trepidation in her tones.

Dr. Maturin rose from his low seat and paced once or

twice to the door and back. There would be no good in storming; besides, Dr. Maturin never stormed, or put himself out much. Disagreeable events sank into his mind and struck quiet root there, bringing forth subsequent fruit of deeds. Just now—for the moral feelings take curious forms sometimes—he was nursing himself in a fancied self-righteousness because he was not as other men are,—men who wanted money for mean, paltry ends, or to pay debts. *He* wanted it to do good with to others; and if he was ambitious, was that a crime?

“What was it your Uncle George said when you told him about this?” he at length asked quite composedly.

“He advised me not to assent. He said I ought not to dispose of the money as—as you suggested, and that——” Here she paused.

“Yes, dear; go on.” The doctor’s voice seemed softer and suaver than usual.

His wife came back into the middle of the room, and began turning over the leaves of an album on the table mechanically.

“Well,” she said at last, “he seemed to think that to give money away for such an object, to get into Parliament, was mercenary; he called it mercenary and calculating. I hope, dear, the words won’t shock you.” She added this hastily, and with a sudden frightened look at her husband’s face.

The doctor had reseated himself on a chair. His arm hung carelessly down, and he was drumming on the carpet with his fingers. He did not seem disturbed; no shadow crossed his face; his voice was as mild and pleasant as ever when he spoke.

“Mercenary and calculating—mercenary and calculating!” he droned over, in a sing-song. “That was your Uncle George. Your Uncle George thinks himself a man of discrimination. It is unfortunate you thought it necessary to tell your Uncle George that I wanted the money for parliamentary purposes—to cut out Wood.”

“I did not say anything about Colonel Wood, Hartas. I did not know you wanted to cut him out. I only said you thought it would help to make you popular in the place.”

Dr. Maturin put the Uncle George incident on one side. He came back to his original object in having this interview with his wife—to extract the needed sum. A change of *tactics* was evidently required.

"I put that parliamentary matter too prominently you, perhaps. Undoubtedly my *chief* object in giving money out of your fortune is to enable us both to ameliorating the condition of the poor around us. As for popularity and getting into the House, that is, of course, a secondary matter. There is no harm in killing two birds with one stone, is there, Janet? Be reasonable about it. Other people know my character for philanthropy too well to misconstrue my motives, like your Uncle George. He's a lawyer, and looks at things on their worst side."

He paused for a minute, hoping that his wife would relent. She, however, gave no sign.

"I hate arguing," Dr. Maturin said at length. "If I can't persuade you, I can't. I did not expect to have this opposition in my own house."

It was true. Dr. Maturin had been accustomed to look on his tall, fragile-figured wife as partaking in spirit of the delicacy and fragility of the body. He did not know that when conscience spoke she would have been torn to pieces rather than disobey; he had never had any internal experiences of a like kind himself.

"I hope, darling, you are not offended," she said, as he rose. She put her arm timidly yet nestlingly on his shoulder and tried to turn his face round to meet hers.

He had never been ungentle or unkind to his wife since their marriage. He was not so now. Gently he placed his protecting arm round her, and, looking down into her eyes, said—

"Dearest, you will do what I ask?"

"Oh, I cannot! I cannot!" she almost screamed. Then she broke into sobs, and hid her face in her hands. But he did not cease to hold her in that embrace.

"Think of the wretched little brats in the slums, longing for fresh air," he pleaded. "This park would save hundreds of young lives."

Her sobs seemed to be stilled. She was thinking. Then she looked, almost wonderingly, at her husband's down-turned face. Their eyes met.

Presently he quietly placed her on a low seat, and, saying "You are tired, I will leave you for a time," went out of the room, and passed into his own part of the house, locking the communicating door behind him.

"I am not a cruel man," he thought, as he sat down at his

writing-table; "but my wife no longer believes in me. For a woman, and a rather silly, flighty one, she has developed a critical faculty which I never dreamed she possessed. I have noticed often of late that she *judges* me. To have a critic and a judge at one's elbow is an intolerable situation. Other men might submit to it; I will not. Then that money, I cannot get it from her. She has thwarted me before in money matters. And *I must have it!* I have never in my life met with this sort of cool, determined opposition. It's a new experience, and a deuced unpleasant one."

Dr. Maturin had been an only child, and it was a real fact that he had hardly ever known what the denial of a strongly felt wish meant. Nursed in luxury, he had been taught that his will was law—the worst of educations. The egotism in his nature readily responded to such treatment. Any limits to his strong, persistent selfishness had hitherto been put by his dislike of trouble. His determination, once formed, was rarely given up.

"Mercenary and calculating!" he hummed over to himself. "My wife believes that of me—thoroughly; I saw it in her face."

There was a long interval of silent thought, while the afternoon darkness seemed to thicken outside, under the shadow of a great elm tree whose branches looked in at the window. Even the meditative doctor appeared to take note of the advancing gloom.

"How I hate twilight!" he said aloud, rising and going to the window to gaze out on the cheerless prospect of a damp patch of gravel strewn with dead leaves. "I must have that tree cut down some day. It darkens the room. It stands in my light—stands in my light," he repeated, softly drumming with his delicate finger-nails on the glass. "And I cannot get the money. I must think what is to be done."

CHAPTER II.

A PHILANTHROPIST SOLILOQUIZES.

THAT same evening Dr. Maturin was more than ordinarily pleasant and lively. He seemed at dinner to have quite got over the effects of his wife's refusal about the money. He

chatted gayly about society, politics, mutual friends, everything that was uppermost at the time in the newspapers or in current talk. Pretty Mrs. Maturin, looking prettier than ever from traces of recent sorrow in her face, listened with evident pleasure, and laughed at her husband's stories in the gayest humor. It was a delightful dinner.

Generally they had visitors to entertain, but this evening they happened to be alone. On such occasions the doctor always granted himself the domestic indulgence of staying behind in the dining-room for ten minutes or so after his wife had left it, to enjoy a cigar over a postprandial cup of coffee. He intended to do so to-night, but, as he was gallantly ushering his wife out of the door, he said—

"And you'll sing me that charming song of yours, Janet, won't you?"

Her eyes brightened with happiness. It was so seldom her husband seemed to care for music. Her face was beaming as she passed into the drawing-room, now brilliantly lit up with two swinging lamps and a host of candles. She went at once to the piano, and began singing in her sweet, low tone a ballad with the refrain, "Had I but known." The words were not striking, but the tune was pretty.

Meanwhile, Dr. Maturin, left alone, wheeled a deep-backed armchair in front of the fire, lit a cigar, and began to ruminate.

He was perfectly determined about obtaining the money for ostentatiously displaying to the public of Manor End his unbounded liberality and zeal for the general good—always with the ultimate object in view of impressing them with the idea that nobody but Dr. Hartas Maturin could under any circumstances be deemed a suitable representative of that suburban district. He acknowledged to himself that that *was* his object. Dr. Maturin was great enough to be above the necessity of self-deception, of the conscious kind. He felt a really deep pity for the poor, confined in stuffy alleys that he shuddered to think of, and for that reason alone would have liked to see them endowed forever with the splendid park which it was now proposed to purchase. But mere philanthropy without ambition, would not have made him so uncommonly generous as he wished to be.

His thoughts soon led him to a point where he laughed, half to himself and half aloud.

"Ridiculous, ha, ha! Positively ridiculous," he softly

murmured, "that *she*, of all people, should oppose *me*! It's most scandalous and outrageous; a physiological absurdity. What *can* she mean by it? I am fond—yes, I really think I am fond of her; but, dear me, is my whole life to be spoiled by her wretched little two-pennyworth of will? She is so absurdly fragile to refuse me anything."

A pause ensued. Then the clever doctor became silent; but his thoughts, if put into words, would have been these—

"She is decidedly fragile. There's that morning cough of hers. Of course I've diagnosed consumption long ago, or a tendency that way. Curable? Well, rarely. Sure to be a long, slow, tedious process. For my own part, I would give every creature, human or bestial, an euthanasia rather than see it linger on and on through the crawling hours of wasting disease. Poor little Janet!"—here he poured himself out another cup of coffee, and knocked the ash from his cigar-stump—"why, it would be the truest kindness to spare you all that. Give *me* sudden death any day, if I have to die! There's that rich, stupid, amiable old father of hers; would he suspect anything? No; he believes in me thoroughly. Besides, his scapegrace son, Bob, and his business keep *him* employed. So long as he can screw enough profit out of his wretched serfs to give himself champagne suppers at Southwold Court, and enable him to swagger as a *parvenu* county swell, he would see fifty people die before his eyes. The selfish old wretch!" said Dr. Maturin to himself, in an access of virtuous indignation.

Then there was an interval spent in lighting another cigar.

"Yes, Uncle George is an opposing force," he went on aloud, or rather in a subdued soothing murmur, which he was in the habit of using in his frequent soliloquies. "He's shrewd, an old fox of a lawyer. Let's assume that he does suspect something, as she's been so inconsiderate as to tell him my money affairs. But then, the whole plan would, of course, proceed on the theory that I do the thing so perfectly as absolutely to leave no trace of what they call foul play behind. If I bungle that, that's my own fault, and Uncle George can take advantage of my slip. But I shan't bungle, and I'll leave no handle to his suspicions. He can have them, but he daren't say them out loud. What! The well-known philanthropist, Dr. Hartas Maturin, deliberately remove his wife! A splendid thing, a reputation like mine.

Imagine the tons of sympathy that would be unloaded upon me 'under these most malignant and unfounded aspersions'—only there won't be any aspersions—from that drivelling sheet, the *North London Express and Advertiser*! It even said, when I opened the bazaar and gave that hundred pounds for the winter soup kitchen, that I bade fair to be a second Peabody. The great Peabody commit murder! What a rich idea!" and he leaned back in his luxurious chair, and laughed long and low.

Dr. Maturin had not noticed that the door had been gently opened, and that a pretty female face was peering in.

"Something seems to be amusing you, dear."

Excellently adjusted as was the doctor's nervous system, he could not subdue an irrepressible start at the sudden interruption to his soliloquy.

"What a fool I am to talk aloud!" was the first thought that flashed across his brain. Then, "I wonder if she heard my last words? I can take my oath the door was not open five seconds ago." He sprang from his chair, took his wife's face in his two hands, and gave her a kiss."

"Why, how you did startle me, darling!"

"And is it true, then?" she asked.

"What true?"

"Why, what I heard you say—that Mr. Peabody had committed a murder?"

The doctor, inwardly disturbed, broke into a merry laugh. "You silly little goose! Did you hear me say that? I was laughing at the bare idea of such a monstrous thing. I was amused at something which a stupid foreign paper I saw at the Club had got hold of; that was all. And how long have you been here eavesdropping, eh, you sly little fox?"

"Only a moment," Janet answered merrily.

"I often talk nonsense to myself. Was that all you heard? What other rubbish have I been concocting and giving to the walls?"

"You never talk nonsense, Hartas; and that was all I heard."

"That's all right," thought the doctor. "Now, let's go into the drawing-room. But don't you come stealing in on me again like that, you puss."

And arm-in-arm husband and wife sauntered into the hall and across it. Janet did not know who Mr. Peabody was, or why it was monstrous to suppose that he had murdered

anybody. At all events, she would not ask her husband any questions now. She was too glad to see him so pleasant; to see that he had forgotten the vexation she had caused him, and of which she already half repented.

The owner of Freemantle House sat down at his wife's elbow as she played and sang, and turned over her leaves for her dutifully. At the end of the song, the doctor applauded. He did not care for the words, he said; the tune had taken his fancy. So that evening closed in on a scene of quiet domestic happiness, such as even Uncle George himself could have found no fault with, had he been there to witness it.

CHAPTER III.

USELESS INTERVENTION.

It so happened that on the very next day Mr. George Betteridge, solicitor, of Red Lion Court, Holborn, deviated so far from his established business routine as to take a cab at mid-day, after snatching a hasty lunch, and drive off to London Bridge Station to catch the 1.30 train to Reigate. His object was to see his brother, John Betteridge, Esquire, J.P., at Southwold Court, and, knowing the habits of that city and rural magnate, he justly surmised that no time was more favorable for finding him at home than when he was enjoying his afternoon nap. Mr. George Betteridge had no sort of compunction in waking anybody up if business had to be done. He knew that his brother stayed at home on Saturdays.

Arrived at Reigate, he strolled leisurely up through the town, and at last came to the lodge gates of his brother's princely domain. The lodgekeeper's wife greeted him volubly, though respectfully; his answer was short, because, to tell the truth, his mind was busy elsewhere, and the nearer he got to the end of his journey the less he seemed to enjoy the errand on which he had set out.

"I dare say, after all, I'm an old fool," he thought, "to bother my head about Dr. and Mrs. Maturin. After all, I've nothing so very black against him. John always did think him spotless—the fellow's so deuced fascinating when he *likes*. Yes, I'm quite prepared," he told the rhododendrons

confidentially, "to be called an ass for my pains. Still, I don't like Janet Maturin's position; it troubles me. And I'll do my best to shield her from her husband, if he *is* as mercenary as I suspect him to be."

Uncle George found the family at afternoon tea. His brother had finished his siesta, and was ready enough for a chat.

"What a time of day for *you* to pay us a visit!" he said, on shaking hands.

"But you are welcome whenever you come, which is not very often," smiled Mrs. Betteridge.

A stranger who had heard that Mrs. Maturin was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Betteridge would, on coming into the drawing-room at Southwold Court, have drawn immediate conclusions as to where Janet Maturin got her beauty from. Evidently she was not indebted for much of it to the head of the house—a type of the flourishing banker, rubicund, heavy-jowled, fat, and featureless. His wife was still tall and straight as a poplar, with eyes beaming with intelligence and amiability. Her manner was something like Janet's, quick, lively, and sensitive; and her features were distinctly good—the delicately shaped nose, the arched mouth; to surmount all, the hair, still beautifully auburn. Certainly Mrs. Betteridge was an admirable mistress for such a mansion as Southwold Court; it must be to her that Mrs. Maturin owed her personal attractiveness.

A stranger thinking this would, however, have been mistaken. Mr. and Mrs. Betteridge had taken on themselves the charge of Janet ever since she was an infant, but she was their niece, not their daughter. A brother of John Betteridge's had died shortly after his marriage; his young widow soon followed him to the silent land; and the little girl-baby had to be taken care of by somebody. She was taken into the family of her uncle, and thenceforth treated and regarded by everybody as the daughter of the house. She had been taught to call Mr. and Mrs. Betteridge her father and mother, and their only child, Bob, had been brought up with her and looked on as her brother. And at marriage it was this new-found father of hers who had dowered her with what some people would have considered as a fortune worthy of a princess.

"Well," said Mrs. Betteridge's attorney brother-in-law, after some ordinary talk, "you can guess I have not come all the way from Red Lion Court to have afternoon tea, although

it's excellent tea, and the tea-maker gives it an additional charm"—here he made a little bow towards Mrs. Betteridge's chair. "The fact is, I want to consult you about a business matter, John."

"I know what that means," said his sister-in-law, resignedly. "Well, you can talk in the library as long as you like. There's a fire there."

When the two brothers had taken their seats on opposite sides of the tiled hearth in the large library, George began by saying—

"I want to speak to you about Maturin."

"Oh, Hartas, you mean."

"Yes; but I never call him by his Christian name."

"You're prejudiced against him."

"Very likely," the solicitor replied dryly. "He may be as much of a saint as you think him. At the same time, I want to let you know something that his wife told me about him the other day."

Mr. John Betteridge shifted uneasily in his seat. "Janet didn't speak against her husband to *you*, did she?"

"Not she; she only said that Maturin was trying to induce her to part with five thousand pounds of her marriage settlement money. Now, I'm not her trustee. You know, John, I've always been sore on that point. But you didn't choose to make me one of the settlement trustees, I suppose because Maturin didn't like me, and it can't be helped now. Now, you and I know that what you gave as Janet's dowry was amply sufficient for all possible needs of her and her husband, using the annual interest only. They've got no children, and there's only the expense of that Manor End House. Certainly he's lavish in charity, but he can afford to be. Well, then, what does he want this five thousand for? Janet told me—silly little woman, she let the cat out of the bag nicely—he wants it in order to make a donation to that fund they're trying to raise to secure the Abbey Estate as a public park."

Mr. John Betteridge broke in emphatically. "An excellent object, too, though I shouldn't do it myself. But Hartas is a philanthropist, you know; it's his hobby—his hobby. There's no harm in *that*, though it's a thumping sum, no doubt."

"It's not the largeness of the sum I mind so much," said the other. "It seems, from what Janet hinted, that he *wants to get into* Parliament, that he's awfully ambitious,

and this donation is simply a low, calculating trick to get all the votes in his favor when he likes to stand."

"I don't believe," observed the owner of Southwold Court sententiously—"I don't believe that Hartas would scheme like that. I don't really believe it. I should like to see him in Parliament, though; it'd suit his talents. He's born to be a nob, is Hartas."

"Well, whether you believe it or not, that's what she told me."

"You may have misunderstood her."

"Pardon me. I'm a lawyer. I am too old a bird to blunder like that."

"Then *she* was mistaken, no doubt. You know how Hartas runs on, how he talks. He may just have thrown in something about Parliament, and Janet flew to the conclusion *that* was his object in wanting the money."

Mr. George felt horribly nonplussed by this persistent optimism.

"Of course," he began, "there are a hundred ways of proving, if you want to do so, that a scoundrel is not a scoundrel——"

"My dear George," said his brother, with pompous dignity, rising from his seat, "I really cannot hear Hartas, as good as my own son-in-law, spoken of in that way in *this* house."

"Well, my remark was a general one, but I withdraw it," George replied. "In any case, *supposing* his object is a bad one, how do we stand? I say it's tremendously cowardly of any man to try and get round or bully his wife when he needs money, instead of going in a business-like way to her trustees, or her relations——"

"Her uncle, for instance, eh?" interjected the other, with a meaning look.

"Yes, her uncle, if you like, as her proper guardian won't help her. I say her position is a very uncomfortable one, to say the least of it. Her trustees are no good to protect her. Maturin knows he can get *their* leave at any moment, so he tries his wife first. There's that Colonel Vane, a mere creature of Maturin's, a weak fool, with a pretty large family already, and expecting another, I hear"—the solicitor was far too eager to attend to grammar—"and Maturin, no doubt, helping him now and then; at all events, asking him constantly to dinner, et cetera. Your son Bob's the other. By-the-by, where *is* Bob now?"

Mr. John Betteridge looked as if he preferred other subjects.

"The last time he wrote to me—for cash—he was at Newmarket."

"Well, he's a minus quantity as far as opposing Maturin is concerned. So really we come to this. Janet is alone, subject to his daily, hourly influence, and being perpetually badgered to part with this huge sum, and with her leave given no other obstacle remains. And recollect, her fortune is a large stake to play for—a hundred thousand. Is this satisfactory? Is it," he added, leaning forward in his chair, and lowering his voice to an effective whisper—"is it *safe*?"

"I really don't know what you're driving at, George," said the city magnate, in an injured tone. "You always have been prejudiced against the man. Such a delightful, open-hearted, jolly fellow, too. I should have thought you would have taken to him. Why, his charity is noted. Everybody admires him. It's really too absurd," he laughed, "to talk about safety as you do."

"I've done my duty," Mr. George Betteridge said, rising; "I can do no more."

"Try and get over this jaundiced view," his brother said.

"Jaundiced view! Upon my word!"

They were out in the hall by this time. Without much formality they parted, George refusing his brother's offer to have him driven down to the station. As he walked down the broad avenue, he felt angry, disappointed, out of humor altogether.

"I've simply wasted a day," he growled. "I should never have done it for anybody I loved less than pretty little Janet. She's my niece, and I don't like her marriage; I never did." He knocked the head off a tall buttercup on the grass edge with his umbrella viciously.

As he was getting into the train, he remembered he had not said "Good-bye" to Mrs. Betteridge, his sister-in-law.

"I wish I had consulted *her*," he said to himself. "Not that women are much good in business affairs generally. But I wonder what *she* thinks of Maturin, in her heart—not officially as his mother-in-law? She's got more sense than John. I *will* consult her some day."

But the day never came till it was too late.

CHAPTER IV.

FAMILY SEANCE.

"You always judge Bob harshly, my dear. Depend upon it, the boy's got something in him."

"That's what I object to," retorted his clear-headed mother, who was having a domestic argument at Southwold Court with her husband. "*I* think he has something in him, too, but it never comes out; it stays in him."

Mr. Betteridge did not recognize, or appeared not to recognize, the pungency of the remark.

"Bob's unconventional, that's what he is. Some of our biggest nobbs were like that—our national heroes. Nelson, for example," said Mr. John Betteridge, who fancied he remembered that the great sea-captain had not given complete satisfaction to his relatives in youth. "He'll blossom late; he'll blossom late."

"If he ever blossoms at all," replied his mother, despondently.

Mr. Betteridge was not to be deprived of the pleasures of son-worship—a superstition still widely prevalent—quite so easily;

"He must be pretty well thought of at Oxford, anyhow; he's brought home a couple o' fine cups, and called 'em prizes. There!"

"The cups were for racing or rowing, or something of that kind."

"He told me this morning," retorted the merchant, "after breakfast, that the big silver flagon was a college trophy—a college trophy. And colleges give prizes for Latin and Greek, not racing, I suppose, eh?"

Mrs. Betteridge was endowed by nature with more shrewdness than her husband had developed even in the course of a long City training. She replied quickly—

"Then, it's a wonder it's got the figures of two men running a race on the outside."

Her spouse was a little staggered, but recovered enough to say—

"Ah, well, learning *is* a race, and a precious hard one too, I found it." After a pause, triumphantly, "There's a lot of Latin going round the bottom of the cup, now I recollect. What does that show? what does *that* show?"

Mr. John Betteridge did not really wish to be informed what that showed; he felt the argument to be already conclusive. His wife remained unconvinced. She would have been glad enough to think that Bob could win a prize for any intellectual proficiency. But the fact that he had passed through Winchester without earning any distinction whatever of the kind—had, in fact, been obliged to leave that school before his time because of what his tutors called "apparently incorrigible idleness," made her sceptical of the possibility of his having done much better at the university.

"And the boy's at work now," his father proceeded, "in the library. I smelt his cigar in passing. Let's see. He went there directly after breakfast. That's two hours he's bin at it. I warrant his friend Lord Freshwater never does anything like that. "There," proceeded the city magnate, complacently, "is one great benefit of going to Oxford. You meet such a lot of nobs. *We* meet nobs in the City, often enough, and I invite 'em here; but we don't get so friendly as Bob has got with his noble friend—his noble friend," Mr. Betteridge repeated, feeling that the expression was an apt one, and that not every parent could boast of the noble friend of his male offspring.

Mrs. Betteridge, always lively and active, jumped up from her seat.

"I can go now and ask him about that cup, while it's in my mind."

"Ah, do. You'll find him in the library."

But this confident prophecy was not quite fulfilled. The comfortable, roomy apartment, looking out on a trim lawn and a fringe of rhododendron bushes, was tenantless; there were some books scattered rather negligently about a side-table, but the bird was a bird of freedom, and had taken flight.

In a few minutes, accordingly, Mrs. Betteridge returned to the dining-room.

"Bob isn't there," she reported, with a sigh.

"Not there?"

"No. His books are there, and a cigar-box. But he must *have gone out*. His hat is not in the hall."

"Ah! perhaps stepped over to see-Dr. Purling at the vicarage, to ask him the meaning of something in his books. Purling's a scholar."

It was an ingenious, but hardly a probable suggestion on the part of Mr. John Betteridge that his son should, of his own free will, go and consult the stores of learning hidden away in the brain of the worthy and elderly pastor of St. Jude's Church, who had been an eminent schoolmaster in his day—eminent enough to empty his school, upon which he retired to a good living.

"More probably in the stables," said his mother. "However, I have no doubt he will come in to lunch. He has a wonderful appetite, I am glad to say. These were two of the books he was reading." Mrs. Betteridge displayed on the table a "Herodotus" and a "Racing Calendar."

"Ah! Greek. Very satisfactory," said Mr. Betteridge. "What's the other? H'm! Ah well, possibly he had been referring to it for a few minutes before he sat down. This is what I call part of his unconventionality, you know."

Mrs. Betteridge smiled. "You are always making excuses for the boy, dear." There was almost a complaining tone about her generally cheerful voice.

Bob Betteridge, however, did not come in to lunch. He did not, in fact, return to Southwold Court till four in the afternoon, when the subject of the prize cups was not even reached, being eclipsed by a more interesting topic. His dog-cart drove up to the entrance at a fast trot, and Mr. Bob jumped down, with a little fox-terrier at his heels.

When he came into the drawing-room, five minutes later, his mother saluted him with, "Well, you're in time for afternoon tea, Bob, at any rate."

"Tea! No thanks. I've had a glass of curaçoa in Tubb's sanctum. I must say I think the quality of the governor's liqueurs might be improved."

Mrs. Betteridge gave another slight sigh, but only remarked, "Where on earth have you been, Bob?"

Before he could answer, his father entered the room.

"Ah! glad to see you, Bob," he said heartily. "I stepped into the library before lunch; saw a Greek book on the table. I suppose it's rather hard reading, eh?" Mr. John Betteridge never could get over his feeling of awe for the classics.

"Well," replied Bob, musingly, "it's pretty stiff going,

certainly. Bohn's rather a weedy hack to get across such country on."

"Who is Bone? the name of a horse?"

"No, mother; wish it was. A beastly translation, you know. Oh, by-the-by," went on Bob, with cheerful irrelevancy, "hope you won't mind, either of you, but I've asked a friend of mine, a lady, in to dinner to-night, and she's coming. I met her at Oxford. Madame Vesta's her name; she's a Hungarian."

"Whom is she staying with here?" asked Mrs. Betteridge.

Mr. Betteridge was too surprised to ask anything just then.

"Well, she isn't staying with anybody in particular. The fact is, she's putting up at the 'Bull and Sceptre,' in the town, you know. I told her it wasn't as good as the Royal. But she's all right—quite a woman of the world. I'm sure you'll like her. She's no end of a mesmerist, and she—"

"A mesmerist!" simultaneously exclaimed Mr. and Mrs. Betteridge, scandalized.

"Yes, that's what she is," said Bob, quite coolly; "and a doosid fine one, I assure you."

"I should think the servants' hall was more the sort of place for a female of that description," Mr. Betteridge observed.

"The servants' hall! Why, she's a perfect lady! She performed before the whole university; everybody went to see her, and talk to her. She gave supper-parties, and she came to breakfasts and wines, and I can tell you she was cottoned to tremendously, by dons and all. There were plenty of Fellows of Colleges used to attend her *seances*. Sir Titus Daft, the Christchurch man, was always there. Old Professor Blower, of B. N. C., went, and she got him on to the stage, and made him dance the "Perfect Cure." Indeed she did."

"I am astonished that a Professor should do such a thing," Mrs. Betteridge remarked, in surprise at Bob's revelations of university life.

"Bless you, mother! he didn't know anything about it; he was mesmerized. And he wouldn't believe it afterwards. He asked Madame Vesta to wine with him, to try and get her to promise never to say anything about it to anybody. And she did promise—she told me so."

"I don't at all like her coming," said Mrs. Betteridge, *with decision* in her tones.

"Staunton's coming too," Bob proceeded, evading the point—"Staunton of John's. He lives over at Dorking. Met him too in the town just now."

"You seem to ask whom you like. Mr. Staunton appeared a nice, steady young man when he called here. Probably he would very much object to meeting this Madame—Madame Vesta."

"Oh, would he! You'll just see."

"It's lucky nobody else is coming to dine this evening," said the owner of Southwold Court, who was beginning to feel resigned to an infliction of a mesmerist in private for one night.

"I'll send her word not to come, if you like," said Bob, sulkily.

"As you've invited her, she had better dine here," Mrs. Betteridge said. "But I shan't ask her to stay the night, Bob."

"She doesn't want to. She's off first thing to-morrow to Brighton to perform there."

When Bob had quitted the room, whistling, Mr. and Mrs. Betteridge agreed that it was, at all events, some comfort that this dangerous foreign female was not going to make a lengthened sojourn at Reigate. They also concluded that perhaps, on the whole, it was as well for them to see her; they could then judge what sort of an influence she would be likely to exert on Bob. If she were handsome there was no knowing whether she would not inveigle him into marrying her. Mrs. Betteridge determined to be very much on the alert that evening—to watch Bob and the mesmerist closely.

Madame Vesta, when she arrived, turned out to be a little woman with a pair of piercing coal-black eyes. These seemed really the most noticeable feature about her. They darted here and there, and appeared to take in everything and everybody in a flash. Her manners were vivacious, and her talk rapid and rather flighty, as if she had a difficulty in concentrating her mind on any one object for long. Mrs. Betteridge was prepared to be critical, but she could find little fault with the miniature lady's manners; her way of speaking English was certainly very correct for a foreigner, an Hungarian.

She was very soon attacked point-blank by her hostess. When they were at dinner, Bob Betteridge having taken his

place next to Madame Vesta, with "Staunton of John's" opposite, Mrs. Betteridge asked—

"Now, what on earth made you take up mesmerism, madame? Are you really and truly a believer in such nonsense?"

Bob and Mr. Staunton both laughed; and the former said—

"I say, mother, draw it mild, you know."

Madame Vesta gave a quick glance round the table, and rejoined with great volubility—

"Ah, you misunderstand! It is not nonsense, at all. It is a power, a faculty; I feel it, and I know what it is. If you felt it, you would know it is not nonsense. And you asked me when I first took it up? But I did not take it up, madame: it took *me* up—I could not resist; and as to mesmerism"—here the little lady shrugged her shoulders—"that I know nothing about. It is a nickname, that is all."

"Quite right; so it is," chimed in Bob.

"It may be a nickname," Mrs. Betteridge remarked; "but I always heard there was a Dr. Mesmer, a German, who practised spiritualism, and lived a long while ago. Is not that the case?"

Mr. Staunton, a young gentleman with pleasant manners, clear-cut features, and a terrific mustache, interposed, probably knowing the extent of Madame Vesta's historical acquaintance with her own science.

"You are quite right, Mrs. Betteridge. Madame, however, I think, has struck out a line of her own. She doesn't follow any school of thought. She is quite an original spiritualist, if I may use the expression."

"Does it off her own bat, you know," Bob added, by way of attempted explanation.

These timely aids, however, Madame Vesta dispensed with. She did not at all mind telling the truth about herself, as far as her theoretical knowledge of the science she practised was concerned.

"This Dr. Mesmer you speak of—well, I know nothing about him—nothing whatever. I am a spiritualist, an electro-biologist. I have in me psychic force—that is what Professor Blower said when I was at Oxford; I always use the expression in my bills now. It attracts, I find. I am right to call myself that which I understand."

"*I am very glad you do understand what psychic force*

means," Mrs. Betteridge could not help retorting ; " for I'm sure I don't."

" She'll show you quick enough after dinner," said Bob.

" And at Oxford they did call it that," went on pertinaacious Madame Vesta. " Now, sir," she proceeded, turning with a winning smile to Mr. Betteridge, who had been sitting rather silent and glum at the end of the table, and focussing on him her brilliant black eyes, " can I be wrong when I call my power, my faculty, the same as Professor Blower at Oxford did call it for me ? "

" H'm ! Well, I don't know," said the host, taken rather aback by this direct appeal. " Certainly Oxford is—ahem ! —one of the chief centres of learning in this country—eh, Mr. Staunton ? "

" No doubt," replied that young gentleman, deferentially.

" Then, if they believe in that sort of thing at Oxford," went on Mr. Betteridge, feeling slightly more at home, " it seems to me there must be something in it, after all ; it can't all of it be "—he was going to say " a confounded imposture," but checked himself just in time—" a delusion." At the same time, it is undoubted that Mr. Betteridge himself, relying on his own unaided judgment, unillumined by academical assistance, *would* have call it a delusion and something more. He did not care about seeing a priestess of the heresy seated at his own table, either. And her remark about her " bills " had horrified him. " It's just like entertaining a fellow out of a travelling menagerie," he said to himself. For Bob's sake, however, he would endure much.

Bob leaned over to his father, and gave him an approving pat on the shoulder. " Well done, governor ! " he said. " By Jove ! I believe you'd be a medium, if you tried. Madame Vesta 'll mesmerize you after dinner in two shakes. Eh, madame ? He would make a subject, wouldn't he ? "

" Mr. Betteridge," replied Madame Vesta, with a modest smile, which displayed a set of dazzlingly white teeth, a recent acquisition, and a useful part of her stock-in-trade—" Mr. Betteridge is very much like that Lord Freshwater whom I met at Oxford. Lord Freshwater was an excellent medium. But perhaps your admirable father's will is too strong. People of strong will are not easily impressed, unless their nerves are—are——"

" *Unstrung* ? " suggested the hostess.

"D'y'e mean that Lord Freshwater—your friend, Bob, you know—did *he* go in for this sort of thing?" interrupted the host.

"Rayther so. I should just think he did. You drew him on to the platform across the floor, on his hands and knees, didn't you, madame?"

Madame Vesta nodded. Mr. Betteridge, senior, was beginning to feel much more respect for the foreign lady. Perhaps, after all, this kind of dabbling in unknown sciences was only a proof of foreign blood—a legitimate laxity on the part of one who had never had the steady influences of a British Sunday and plum-pudding.

"On his hands and knees!" exclaimed Mrs. Betteridge. "Why he's a member of the House of Lords, is he not, Bob?"

"Can't help that," said Bob, with decision. "House of Lords or not, he had to come. You should have seen him swarm up the side of the platform, and grovel at Madame Vesta's feet!"

"Grovel at her feet!"

"He was in a trance—a psychic trance," said madame, in explanation.

"A very dangerous woman," thought Mrs. Betteridge; and for the rest of dinner she contrived to lead the conversation on to less debatable matters. She found that madame was a Hungarian lady of noble birth, according to her own account, though she seemed never to have heard of Buda-Pesth when interrogated on that subject. There was one good point about her—she drank no wine.

"It hinders the *force*!" she explained.

After dinner the gentlemen talked a long time over their cigars. It is probable this was a manœuvre of the host to keep himself away from the mesmeric influence of Madame Vesta for as long as possible. It had that effect, though it also had another; Bob went on drinking, and so did Mr. Staunton in a less degree. So that when they arrived in the drawing-room, to the great relief of Mrs. Betteridge, left alone with the "foreign woman," Bob was rather merrier and more "unconventional" than usual.

The whist-table was already brought out into the middle of the room, with the cards ready placed on it, and two candles burning. Bob unceremoniously shut it up, and wheeled it into a corner.

"We're going to have a *séance*, mother. No end of a lark."

"I should much prefer whist," said Mrs. Betteridge. "I don't approve of *séances*. Besides, Madame Vesta has no medium to operate on here."

"Oh, yes, she has. Here's Staunton. She can mesmerize me too, only it takes longer. I can't concentrate my mind on the key. She gives you a key to hold, you know, and tells you to think of nothing else. It's confounded hard to concentrate your mind on a key. But old Staunton can do it. You'd like to see Madame Vesta operate, wouldn't you, pa?"

"If she does not mesmerize *me*," said the host, politely and resignedly.

"Ah, sir," said Madame Vesta, "your striking resemblance to Lord Freshwater makes me sure that you would be an excellent subject. But it is only those willing that I wish to influence. I will promise madame, too"—with a graceful bow to the mistress of the house—"that she shall be pleased that she shall have no reason to doubt of my power any more, and that she shall quite approve—quite approve."

Mrs. Betteridge, for politeness' sake, could not veto the proposed exhibition. She wished her husband would do so, but then, he always yielded to Bob. So she stood, "with sick and scornful looks averse" near the fireplace. When Bob came over, she said to him aside—

"I don't like this foreigner, if she is a foreigner. Is it true that your father is like Lord Freshwater?"

"Well, yes; a little bit—not much."

"In his face?"

"No, not in his face so much. Freshwater's fat, you know; so's the governor. We call him Rhombus at the 'varsity."

"Rhombus?"

"Yes; it's a figure that's got all its sides equal, you know. Some men call him Porpoise, but that's bad form."

Mrs. Betteridge was more confirmed than ever in her belief that, if Oxford were really the chief centre of learning in this country, other centres must be very backward indeed. She made a note in her own mind of the information about Lord "Rhombus," in case her husband should be too elated with his supposed resemblance to that nobleman.

In the *séance* that ensued neither the host nor hostess "took a hand." Mrs. Betteridge disapproved. Mr. Bet-

idge was mortally afraid that, if he gave the mesmerical visitor any encouragement, she would make *him* too, like Lord Freshwater, come to her "on his hands and knees," and "grovel at her feet." For the owner of Southwold Court to crawl on his hands and knees across his own drawing-room carpet, he felt would be a catastrophe almost as appalling as the break-up of a City bank.

Mr. Staunton, however, was a voluntary victim. It was curious to observe how Madame Vesta, when professionally engaged, lost her flightiness and volubility altogether. She spoke in low and measured tones. She repeated her orders once, twice, thrice. She did not flash her eyes round the room; she concentrated their gaze on the subject of her psychic experiment. When she believed the spell had been worked, she rose from her seat, clapped her hands suddenly, and exclaimed—

"Do the same."

Staunton, of John's, obeyed mechanically.

"What shall I tell him to do?" Madame Vesta whispered to Bob, who was at her side.

"Tell him to fetch something. Make him go into the butler's pantry, and fetch up the plate-basket."

"You see, he's clever enough at this sort of thing," Mr. Betteridge remarked to his wife, *sotto voce*.

"I wish he were more stupid at it," she replied.

No sooner had Madame Vesta, in slow speech thrice repeated, told Mr. Staunton what she wanted, than he faced round to the door, walked quickly to it, opened it after fumbling for a moment impatiently with the handle, and disappeared.

Madame now for the first time looked round rather triumphantly.

"He will not be long," she said.

He was not long. The sound of angry voices in the hall, of a decided scuffle, too, was heard; then the door burst open. Tubbs, the florid butler, looking as red as a turkey-cock, staggered into the room, holding by the collar the subject of Madame Vesta's experiment, who was struggling violently to free himself, and at the same time pressing forward towards the mesmerist, as if life and death depended on his speed. His shirt and coat were very much disordered. He was almost black in the face from the pressure of the *butler's knuckles* against his wind-pipe. But he held in his

hand the captured plate-basket. Bob burst into a roar of laughter

With a last effort, he dragged Tubbs across the floor, and deposited the basket at the feet of Madame Vesta. Tubbs let go his hold, and panted.

"What's the meaning of this?" shouted Mr. Betteridge, whose notions of propriety were outraged by this exhibition. "Tubbs, you've forgotten yourself. You don't seem to know your place."

"Beggin' your parding, sir," replied the butler; "I knows my place well enough to know that nobody mustn't run off with my plate-basket, if *I* can 'elp it."

"He's quite right," said Mrs. Betteridge, in a whisper.

"But—but didn't you see—didn't you recognize him?" the master of the house went on. "Didn't you see he was the gentleman who had dined with us—my guest, hey?"

"No, sir, I did *not*," said the butler, stolidly. "I was in the pantry, when all of a suddint this 'ere gent rushed in, lookin' so strange, and nabbed the basket, with the silver in it, 'fore you could say—say anythink. What's more, he'd have been horf in a moment, only I cotched him. It was his fault. I asked him what he wanted, but he wouldn't speak. What was I to do, sir?"

"What indeed?" asked Mrs. Betteridge, pointedly.

"He *could* not speak; he was under *my* influence," said Madame Vesta.

"Will you kindly release him from your influence now?" Mrs. Betteridge asked frigidly.

"And you can leave the room, Tubbs. I dare say you thought it was all right. I make ~~great~~ excuses for you," said his master, in a pompous tone.

Tubbs retired.

Bob had now recovered from the paroxysm of laughter into which his friend's appearance in the custody of the butler had plunged him. When Staunton, by a few rapid passes of Madame Vesta's hands before his eyes, was released from his apparant mesmeric trance, Bob asked him, with great interest, what he thought he had been doing.

"I've been carrying something," said Staunton, looking round him in a half-dazed state.

"I should think you had! And don't you remember being half scragged, eh!"

Staunton looked at his coat and shirt, and then said,

"Well, I *do* recollect there was some obstacle. I had some slight difficulty in carrying what I had hold of."

Bob burst into another roar of laughter.

Mr. and Mrs. Betteridge were both strongly of opinion that, after this exhibition of her powers, Madame Vesta should not perform again in their drawing-room. It was too exciting. And the impression already made in the servants' hall was probably of the worse description.

Bob wanted to see Madame Vesta home. Mrs. Betteridge prayed him not to do so, in private, and he yielded, resigning to Staunton of John's the charge of that "original spiritualist" to her hotel quarters.

The next day Mrs. Betteridge had a headache, Bob was sulky, Madame Vesta had gone off early to Brighton, and Tubbs had given notice. That worthy menial had felt his highest sensibilities trampled on by having his plate-basket looted by a mesmerized lunatic. And he looked with the utmost pain on the evil courses to which the family at Southwold Court, hitherto deemed most respectable, seemed to be taking, in thus patronizing at their own table a female who exhibited her acquaintance with the powers of darkness at five shillings for front seats in the town hall. Mr. Betteridge, however, succeeded in convincing him that it was to his interest to remain in the family. Tubbs obligingly put down the painful incident connected with "that there furren woman" to the bad influence of the "young gent from Oxford."

This young gent in a day or two took his departure for Liverpool, having a pressing engagement there, not wholly unconnected with the fact that the Grand National Steeplechase was about to be decided; and while his mother wondered and sighed, the soul of Tubbs was at peace.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. MATURIN'S CONFIDENCES.

MRS. LONGSTAFF, the housekeeper at Freemantle House, was a woman of character. She was neither handsome nor ugly. She could not be more than thirty-five, yet she had *been* a widow twelve years. She had no "encumbrances,"

beyond a tender heart. As a rule, she was exceedingly reticent, not to say taciturn. To those she trusted she would talk readily, in private; and Mrs. Maturin she positively worshipped. She regarded herself as her guardian. She would not allow her to keep a lady's-maid; she performed that office herself. And Janet liked having constantly near her a woman of sense and education, and looking like a lady; also one on whom she insensibly relied for advice and assistance, if need arose.

"Dr. Maturin has gone to Town. He won't be home till six or seven," she said. "I think I will have the carriage out, and go over to Finchley this afternoon, Maria."

Mrs. Longstaff was in the dining-room, having just received her orders for the day from her young mistress. The orders which Janet gave Mrs. Longstaff were invariably the suggestions humbly propounded by Mrs. Longstaff a few minutes before.

"You don't seem quite yourself to-day, madam." The housekeeper spoke in a tone of anxiety.

Janet gave a little shiver, and said, "No; perhaps I am not feeling very bright. That is why I want a drive. I shall visit the Vanes. Mrs. Vane always cheers me up, if I am low."

The housekeeper would not have dreamed of disputing her mistress's clearly formed intention. She noticed a dark ring under Janet's eyes. "It's that doctor" (she never would call him "the master" to herself); "I believe he worries her" (this was what she thought, but did not say), "poor thing! How he can have the conscience! But there! men are like that. And everybody respects him so." She brought a thin Shetland shawl, and carefully adjusted it round her mistress's shoulders.

"Will there be company to dinner to-night, madam?" she asked.

"Yes, a few people, I think."

"It would be better for you to rest if you could."

"Oh, no," Janet said gayly; "I am quite equal to it. Only mind and order the carriage for three."

When Mr. George Betteridge described Colonel Vane as a weak-minded tool of Dr. Maturin's, he was representing the real state of affairs with substantial accuracy. At the same time, there were two things which prevented the colonel from being a mere vassal of the clever doctor: one was that he

was merely weak-minded, and nothing worse; and the other, that he had a wife whose strong common sense had often helped him out of difficulties, and who was not among Dr. Maturin's female admirers.

Some of those mysterious arrangements known only to the India Office and the War Office had turned Colonel Vane out of active army work at the early age of forty-two, on the pleasing theory that he was "superannuated." This treatment had helped to crush the colonel's spirit. It did not matter to him that on retirement he got an honorary step in rank—that, whereas before he had been known as Major, he was now Colonel, Vane. He had a sufficient family, a small income, and he wanted to have work—and pay. He felt that he had a good twenty years, at least, of possible active life in him; to figure as a compulsory veteran in the prime of his years was odious. He settled down at Finchley, in a smallish house, with his wife and four children, whose numbers were soon to be recruited by a fifth; and he also settled into the habit of grumbling at his fate to anybody willing to listen. At the time when this narrative begins he had been at Finchley three years, and he had struck up a great friendship with the Maturins. He liked the doctor, because he was one of the few men who seemed really to sympathize with his military wrongs. It was true that Dr. Maturin always contrived to cut the story short after it had progressed a little way, but he did it in such a skilful style of conversational surgery that he conveyed the idea of being really too horrified to listen to such iniquity in high places. What! the State to be deprived prematurely of such splendid services as Colonel Vane, no doubt, was able to offer! The colonel thought, when he first talked with the doctor at the club, that he was one of the pleasantest fellows he had ever met. Since that time the intimacy had grown much stronger, the ex-major figuring as a trustee when the doctor took to himself a wife, while the doctor had been very useful to the ex-major in monetary matters; had, in fact, lent him money, and assured him that it did not matter if he took years to repay the loan. This was a characteristic which appealed to the colonel's warmest feelings. A man who would do that sort of thing deserved to be encouraged, and he encouraged him—by going to dine with him at Manor End about once a fortnight.

About the same time that Mr. George Betteridge, solicitor,

was walking up the High Street at Reigate on his way to Southwold Court, Mrs. Maturin's neat brougham was driving that lady over to Colonel Vane's house at Finchley. The Vanes were always delighted to see Janet there; Mrs. Vane because she really enjoyed a talk with her pretty, innocent, mirthful friend, and the colonel because he liked having a brougham at his door on principle, and saw an invitation to dinner and cards looming in the distance.

Janet Maturin's object in calling was merely to see Mrs. Vane, enjoy a conversation with her, and ask her to come over to the house at Manor End and spend a few days with her. Since the refusal to give her husband the five thousand pounds she had felt rather unhappy—not because she really wavered in her determination, but because she acknowledged to herself that her husband had revealed himself to her in a new and strange character. She still believed him to be thoroughly good and honorable in most matters, and she had no doubt whatever of his natural bent towards philanthropy. But she felt that when money was concerned his morality was not hers. To a certain extent she humbly put this down to her ignorance of the world, and she admitted in her own mind that many men whom she knew and liked would probably see nothing wrong in using a charitable subscription for selfish purposes. But there was no denying that the mixture of charity and worldly-mindedness did seem to her an extreme profanation, or that her husband no longer occupied quite the same exalted position in her estimation that he had done before. Here were elements enough to make a young wife unhappy; besides which, the necessity of opposing Dr. Maturin's wishes with her own veto was utterly distasteful to her. Hitherto she had taken pride in her loving deference to his will, and it seemed as if the solid ground turned into shifting quicksand when conscience ordered her to be resolutely disobedient to him.

She was received at the hall door—they called it a hall, but it was merely a passage—with open arms by Lizzie Vane, Colonel Vane's wife.

"My dear, I'm so glad you've come! You have no idea how Henry has been going on this morning. Do come in and help me to soothe his ruffled spirit;" and Mrs. Maturin was pushed into the dining-room almost before she knew where she was.

Colonel Vane was sitting in an armchair near the window,

a picture of good-looking middle-aged despondency. He rose and shook hands with Mrs. Maturin as she entered.

"You really should not ask people in here, Lizzie," he grumbled. "Mrs. Maturin would like to go into the drawing-room, and I will come too."

"Don't listen to him, Mrs. Maturin," said Mrs. Vane; "I know what's best for him. I know you'll excuse coming into the dining-room. It suits him to be here. It's much the most cheerful room in the afternoon, because it gets the sun; and then, it looks out on the road, and Henry is miserable if he sees no life."

"You don't look very bright yourself. Hope all's right at home. Is the doctor quite well?" the colonel asked.

"Quite. He has gone into the City to-day, to get some apparatus that he wants fitted up in the consulting-room." ("Ah! sneaked off to the club, no doubt," thought the colonel enviously, judging others by himself). "I don't know what it is, but he said he was trying some experiment. So I came off here, and I'm afraid I have not chosen my time very well, but I didn't know——" Mrs. Maturin stopped, and looked rather shy and confused.

"You didn't know he would be grumpy. Of course not," broke in Mrs. Vane. "How is one to know, unless they publish a chart every morning in the newspapers? But I assure you it's only temporary. Your coming will cheer him up. It's a letter from the War Office has upset him to-day. That's why I made him sit in this room. The drawing-room when he's good-tempered, the dining-room when he's bilious. I tell him to take more exercise, but he won't."

"What's a fellow to do, Mrs. Maturin?" the colonel asked, with an approach to a whine in his voice. "You know my position. Let's see, I've told you how they forced me to retire, haven't I?"

"Oh yes, yes," said Janet, in alarm.

"That's a pity. It's a most interesting story. Didn't you think so?"

"Most interesting."

Mrs. Vane was sitting eying the two with a comical smile, and now exchanged a rapid glance with Mrs. Maturin.

"Well," the colonel went on, regretfully abandoning a chance of delivering himself once again of the oft-told tale of his ill-treatment by a despotic Government, "you know what *my situation is*. I want to get something to do, and that

beastly War Office won't give it me. Just imagine their insulting a man of my position, and—and character by a letter like this, which I received this morning!" He flourished a piece of paper in the air.

"Is it very bad?" Mrs. Maturin asked.

"Bad? It's scoundrelly. I offered 'em to go out to Bombay *myself*, waiving my right to remain snugly at home, and accept ordinary pay, without any addition for active service, and—would you believe it?—they coolly reply on a printed form—*on a printed form*—that the number of applications for employment is already far in excess of the requirements of the commander-in-chief!"

A shy-looking little boy, with spectacles on, came into the room. On seeing Mrs. Maturin, he threw a book he had in his hand on to the floor, and rushed to get on her lap. From this post he was unceremoniously pulled off by his father.

"There's that young noodle!" Colonel Vane went on. "He's seven years old. What's to become of him? He's no good for the army or navy, because he's shortsighted——"

"What nonsense you talk!" exclaimed his wife. "As if boys hadn't to be clever, and nothing else nowadays, to pass examinations."

"And I *can* be a sailor—I know I can," broke in the boy, "because I've read about Nelson, and *he* had only one eye, and he put the telescope up to it, and I've got two," he finished proudly.

The others laughed.

"He has spirit, you see," said Mrs. Vane.

A noise in the hall as of an army approaching denoted that Willy's three little sisters had come in from a walk. They were all kissed and fondled by Mrs. Maturin, who would have liked to take one home to her lonely house at Manor End, had it been possible. Soon afterwards she and Mrs. Vane went to have a private "chat" in the drawing-room.

"I want to ask you a favor," Janet Maturin said, blushing. "I hope you won't think it a liberty. But when the new baby is born, if it is a girl, I should so like to have it called after me." She rose from her seat, and threw her arms impulsively round Mrs. Vane's neck. "Oh, I am so fond of you! I feel sometimes as if you were my only friend. I mean, of course, except my mother—my mother and my husband and all my relatives."

There *was* something in the way in which she spoke these words that Mrs. Vane did not quite like. She took Janet's

face between her hands—Janet was kneeling—and kissed her in return; then she said simply and kindly—

"Tell me, dear, have you anything making you unhappy? You don't look yourself to-day."

"Oh, I am quite well, quite happy!" Mrs. Maturin exclaimed, rising from her knees. Who could be happier than I?" she went on vivaciously. "Have not I a lovely home, and a perfect husband, and nearly everything I want? What could make you dream I was unhappy, dear?"

"Oh, very well!" Mrs. Vane replied, with an air of obvious relief.

Curiously enough, now that she had succeeded in taking her friend in, Mrs. Maturin's eyes filled with tears, and she had a quite unaccountable longing to fling herself at Mrs. Vane's feet, and sob forth to her attentive ear the whole story of what her husband wanted her to do, and why she had refused to do it.

"By-the-by, I wanted to ask you," she said, with an affectation of carelessness, "have you heard of a murder by a man called Peabody? It's in the papers, I think. It's something surprising; somebody you would never think *would* commit a murder. Haven't you seen it?" Janet ended impatiently.

"Not I, my dear. I read the paper this morning, but I saw nothing about it."

"Then, who is the *great* Mr. Peabody?" asked Mrs. Maturin.

"There's no great Mr. Peabody that I know of, *except* the one who gave a lot of money to the poor. He *was* a famous philanthropist."

"A philanthropist!" Janet exclaimed, in surprise and dismay. "And did he—oh, *do* think!—did he not murder somebody?"

"What extraordinary questions you do ask, child! Of course he did not. What could put such an idea in your head?"

There were no longer tears in Mrs. Maturin's eyes. But there was a look of intensely troubled thought. She would not, however, for worlds say anything more that might lead Mrs. Vane to be suspicious of her relations with her husband.

"I must have made some stupid mistake, she said, smiling; but her face seemed paler than before. "And you haven't answered my humble request yet about the baby's name."

Mrs. Vane as an answer gave her an affectionate kiss, and *whispered in her ear* that it should be as she wished.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OBSTACLE REMOVED.

EMOTIONAL natures, which are easily impressed, usually carry with them a corresponding advantage, or disadvantage, that the impression does not last long. The coloring of the picture engraved on the mental and spiritual canvas is too vivid to be permanent. This was the way with Mrs. Maturin's impressions, and in this respect she singularly differed from her husband, who, though equally sensitive, did not seem to lose the feelings of Monday by the following Saturday. On the contrary, if they lay sometimes covered over in his mind, he had a wonderful faculty of reproducing them at will in all their original strength. *His* impressions of this year were equally powerful next year. Perhaps this was because they were not entirely emotional; because there was infused into them at the time of their first creation a strong admixture of keen, relentless intellect and domineering will.

It was about ten days after her drive to the Vanes' house at Finchley, and Janet had been surprised that her husband had not renewed the horribly unpleasant money subject. That being so, she on her part began to forget the shock she had received, nor did she ever find opportunity, or courage, to ask him for an explanation of the murder by a great Mr. Peabody, who apparently had never committed a murder at all. As the whole subject seemed to be dying away naturally of itself, Janet's memory of it grew fainter too. Each day that passed without any recurrence of Dr. Maturin's request increased her growing feeling of confidence, almost of happiness. Maria Longstaff, housekeeper, noticed the change in the mistress's manner with great satisfaction. It was no longer unlike her own gay, cheerful, merry-hearted self. And Dr. Maturin himself was so kind. During all these days he seemed to go out of his way to please his pretty wife. He would ask her whom she cared to have at dinner: would bring her little presents; would saunter around the garden with her when the sun shone. It was true that he seemed to be *hard at work* in his laboratory every morning; but then

he emerged afterwards, and made up for a morning of absence by his charming vivacity all the rest of the day.

On this tenth day they had been lunching quietly, and had gone into the drawing-room. It was a dull, overcast sky outside, with rising wind. A cold, damp day, harbinger of coming winter; but a bright fire glowed on the hearth.

"Do you feel quite well, Hartas? You look worn."

"I have a headache, dearest."

"Well, if you'll sit down, I'll read to you for half an hour. It's a perfectly lovely book, so exciting—'Travels in Ecuador,' it's called. I got it from the library."

"The 'Travels in Ecuador? I took that book up this morning. It's one of the best you've had from Mudie's recently, dear. I got quite excited in the gentleman's adventures myself."

"It's not a gentleman; it's a lady!" Janet Maturin clapped her hands, and burst into a peal of merry laughter at her husband's mistake.

"I did not read much of it, I confess. But it interested me tremendously what I did see. And so it was a lady, was it? Clever puss! You see, she writes in the first person; how could I tell she belonged to your sex?"

Janet came just opposite her husband, and, playing with his watch-chain, said, "Will you tell me one thing?"

"Any number, dearest."

"Did you read as far as the adventure with a bear?"

Dr. Maturin looked down on the upturned face with a smile. "I'm too old to be caught in that way, Janet. I don't believe there's a bear in the whole book. At any rate, there can't be any in Ecuador."

"No; it was a panther, not a bear. I wanted to take you in. But where is the book now?"

The doctor looked over the drawing-room tables for the missing volume. But it was nowhere visible.

"I tell you what, Janet dear—I must have left it in the consulting-room. I remember I took it in there to look at." He did not rise from his seat, as if intending to fetch it, which was odd in a man so polite in his domestic relations as was the clever doctor.

"Ah, I forgot! Your poor head. I'll go for it myself. Whereabouts did you put it?"

"I think I must have slid it into the book-case near the fire."

"So that, sir, is how you have been employing your time in there! But you *have* been working harder than usual lately, Hartas? Is the new apparatus you spoke about come yet?"

"It came some days ago. I shall try an experiment shortly. Go, dear!"

Janet glided out of the room, shutting the door quietly behind her.

The doctor did not turn round, but listened for a moment to make sure that she was gone. He then rose from his seat, shook himself together, and looked at the clock, ticking in subdued tones in its marble case. It had no minute hand; moreover, he was not sure it was right. He liked exactitude in his scientific observations, so he moved his hand to take his own watch from its pocket.

But at that instant his hand seemed arrested. He dropped it again by his side.

Nature does not create monsters. Even in her most horrible freaks, her most awful experiments, she seems to include in the human organism that she is moulding some elements of that finer clay of which the saints and heroes are compact.

Dr. Maturin had for the first time caught, through the thick veil of obscuring egotism, a glimpse of the moral aspects of the deed he was doing—its meanness, its cold-blooded cruelty. What! was he really about to register the time which his wife took in dying, like an umpire at a race, each moment that passed representing a feebler pulsation of the heart, each five minutes a distinct ebb in the tide of life?

Yes, he admitted to himself that was what he was about to do. Then came the rush of reasons, justifying him in the deed. Still, the idea *was* rather horrible and unpleasant. But it was necessary to have the time at which she entered the room precisely. The clock before him said half-past four.

That reluctance to draw out his own watch was the last stand made by natural human kindness, the final protest of instinct against crime. With a stern determination to go on as he had plotted, yet almost with a suppressed sob, he drew his gold watch slowly from his pocket, placed it on the mantelpiece before him, and said to himself, "Four thirty-four exactly."

Then he folded his hands behind him, and turned round

to the tenantless apartment. His face was much paler than usual. He took out his silk handkerchief and wiped his forehead. Why, that was a footfall in the hall! Surely—surely nothing could have gone wrong? Had she escaped the snare? Had she returned to tell him his well-laid plot was discovered? to hurl at him some of the reproaches which a brutish world was in the habit of uttering when it had ordinary homicides to deal with? The door was opening; even in that lightning flash of a moment before the opener entered, he heard the rustle of the silk skirt, and was prepared to meet his wife—returned to him, as it were, from the other side of death.

It was indeed Janet Maturin.

"I have come—— Why, Hartas! what makes you look so pale?"

For a moment Dr. Maturin stood trembling, holding to the mantel with one hand, while with the other he grasped at the chair-back for support. He had been literally horrified at the idea, not of his wife's death, but of any blunder which would prevent its being absolutely painless and peaceful and unconscious. His weakness lasted but for a moment. He saw from his wife's face that she knew *nothing*, that she suspected *nothing*. But why had she returned?

Janet's first idea was that her husband was ill. She ran across the floor, and put her arm round his back to support him.

"Sit down, dear," she said, with an inexpressible tenderness in her voice. "Is it your head?"

Dr. Maturin seemed to have recovered from the attack, or whatever it was that ailed him. He preferred standing, he said. It was only a slight feeling of—of dizziness and nausea that he had experienced just before she came into the room. He was better now.

"Darling! why have you come back?" he said.

Meanwhile Janet was looking into his face half pityingly, half inquiringly. There was something there that disquieted her, that she did not understand; yes something that almost frightened her. How curious that she should leave her husband in his arm-chair, too tired even to go into the laboratory for her book, and yet that a moment after he should have risen from his seat, and placed his watch on the mantlepiece! for she saw that he had done this.

"Your watch, dear—*why* have you placed it here?"
She spoke in low, anxious tone.

The doctor had recovered full possession of his splendid faculties. He turned his eyes vaguely in the direction of her gaze, and looked very much surprised to see his watch there. Then he felt in his watch-pocket to make sure it was not in that receptacle.

"I really don't know what I was about," he said, with a feeble smile, and passed his hand across his brow wearily.

It was a piece of perfect acting, and Janet's doubts were removed. She gave a sigh of relief, and said—

"You forgot to give me the key, dear."

"The key! Why the laboratory door is not locked."

"No, but the passage door is."

The passage door! Ah! he had forgotten that. He took the key from his pocket and handed it to her. She put it on the table, and said—

"I won't go yet—till you are better."

"Yes, dear, yes; I *am* better. Go at once."

"Sit down first in this chair, and let me nestle at your feet on this rug—so."

"You are spoiling me, darling," he replied, sinking into the chair. "But if you went now, you could get me a small bottle of salvolatile which stands on the shelf, as well as your book."

"I will go, then," said Janet, springing up, and taking the key from the table. "Only don't stir till I come back, dearest, or you may become dizzy again. Promise me you won't stir."

"Darling, I promise."

The second time she passed lightly out of the room. This time he distinctly heard the key turn in the lock of the door leading into his own passage and on to his consulting-room. Then all became silent.

Outside the house the wind had risen, and the windows rattled with the fierce gusts that occasionally beat against the walls. As the doctor sat and listened, he wondered if the storm would interfere with the result of his experiment—that was how he thought of it to himself. He did not care much for sitting quietly while the evening shadows were creeping about the room; he would have liked to get up, ring the bell, and order Mrs. Longstaff to come and light all the lamps and candles immediately. But he did not dare to stir just yet. He must not be found again by his wife in an attitude inconsistent with headache and dizziness; he must allow a longer time to elapse before he could feel that all was safe!

What thoughts passed through his mind while sitting there no pen save that of the recording angel will ever write. They could not be altogether agreeable, for, though chained to his chair, he shifted uneasily; even egotism is not an absolute protection against the great primary human emotions, which have a habit of welling up in unexpected places and times, like the mysterious underground rivers of Eastern countries. But whatever were his feelings or thoughts, Dr. Maturin at this crisis kept them well in control. The enterprising birds that now and then hopped on the window-sill, thence to be quickly driven by a furious blast, were not frightened by anything that they saw in that dusky room—a man lolling in an armchair, a fire burning.

Certainly the tempest was more violent than it had been. Half an hour had passed since Mrs. Maturin's departure from the room. The doctor thought it was time to be stirring. If his heart beat perceptibly faster as he neared the *dénouement* of this tragedy of his own creation, yet he was not conscious of a sentiment of sorrow; still less of contrition. Rather he felt exultant to think that an obstacle to his conquering course through life had been brushed aside. He felt proud that he had had the courage to do a deed at the mere mention of which the cheek of the commonplace noodle of society, the fools and Pharisees by whom he was habitually surrounded, would blanch in deadly terror.

The silence all over the house was oppressive. The outside howling of the wind was an aggravation, almost an insult. It seemed intentional. Being so, it steeled his egotism to meet it. He had overcome any foolish compunctious visitings in his own breast; no external power should move him.

He passed out into the hall. Just as he did so he felt something soft and velvety brush against his ankle, and, looking down, saw that it was his wife's pet cat. It was purring complacently, and arching itself against his leg. He stooped and stroked it, and the bell slung on a blue ribbon round its neck tinkled, as he had so often heard it tinkle before on his wife's lap. "Poor pussy!" he said. Dr. Maturin prided himself on being very kind to dumb animals. Usually this cat inhabited the housekeeper's room, and Dr. Maturin, man of the world and man of science as he was, did not know enough of the natural history of his own house to be aware *that where the cat was*, the housekeeper was not very far off.

In this instance the cat heralded the housekeeper; generally it followed her.

The drawing-room door was almost closed. He pushed it open for the cat to walk in, as it evidently wished to do. The animal, which had curious dark yellow, tiger-like bands crossing its silky white coat, looked up at him and purred again, inviting a stroke. Dr. Maturin stooped; the creature went further into the room, and the doctor followed. A gust of wind slammed the door. Once more the cat approached its master, and rubbed confidently against him; but then, as he put down his hand to caress it, it emitted a slight scream, and, launching itself into the air, fastened its teeth on his arm. Its fangs were embedded in the flesh, and he had to shake twice or thrice before the animal unloosed its hold. It ran under a sofa near the window, and there remained, its eyes shining.

"Curse it!" the doctor exclaimed savagely. He did not like to make a fuss just then; but his arm was lacerated, and his shirt-sleeve discolored with blood. He hastily sucked at the wound, which was not deep, and then bound his handkerchief round it. As he opened the door once again, the cat darted past his legs, and rushed away. The incident had been an unpleasant one. It jarred on the doctor's nerves. Had Janet's cat an innate sympathy with its mistress?

He took a few steps up and down the hall, to recover as well as he could his ruffled equanimity. Glancing at the door communicating with his own professional apartments, he noticed it open. No doubt Janet had left it so, designing to return quickly. Well, and where was she now? he thought. Would her light springy step approach it, pass through it, and her merry laugh ring on his ear? Do what he might he could not keep his eyes from the half-open door. It seemed to exercise a fascination over him. So strongly did he feel this that he stepped hastily across and shut it quickly; then, peering round to see that he was not watched, he put his ear to it and listened. The howling of the tempest prevented any sound that might be coming from his consulting-room being heard. It also quite deadened the footsteps on the stairs of somebody who had come up them, and who was standing at the top, in the dusk, looking into the hall.

There was a sudden crash, which resounded through the house. The doctor listened for a moment, then darted across to the room he had just left, groped his way to the

fireplace, and rang the bell violently. He was really astonished at Mrs. Longstaff answering the bell so quickly. But perhaps *she* too had heard the crash.

As he was about to speak, a frightened-looking housemaid rushed up from below stairs.

"Please, Mrs. Longstaff; oh, please, sir; but John says the great elm tree have a fallen, and smashed in the window. Oh, dear!"

"What window?" asked the doctor, peremptorily.

"The window o' your hown room, if you please, sir; through that there passage, sir;" and she pointed to the door leading to the laboratory.

Even at that exciting moment the doctor's wits did not desert him. He had time to recollect that quite half an hour had elapsed since his wife must have entered the fatal room till now, so that, even if the whole room had been wrecked, the work was done. It flashed across him that possibly something had happened to hide the traces of his individual activity. Was Providence actually intending to help him? Was the blow of a falling tree to kill over again one who had already perished by his own more subtle and more certain method of destruction.

"Run, one of you, to the consulting-room, and see what has happened!" he shouted. He did not mean to go himself. He had always intended to send one of the servants to look for his wife; he had a distinct prejudice, almost a superstitious prejudice, against being the first to make the discovery that there awaited the intruder.

He himself took his hat from a peg, and opened the front door. He would go and see the damage from outside. But the wind was so strong he had difficulty in pulling it after him; and standing there, behind one of the great pillars supporting the portico, in the gloom and dusk, with whips of rain driving now and then in his face, he listened to the elemental strife.

Meanwhile the two servants, the housekeeper and housemaid, stood in the hall.

Mrs. Longstaff felt it right to assume an air of authority, though her voice shook.

"Mary, the doctor spoke to *you*!"

For all answer Mary gave a half-shriek, and scurried down the stairs into the kitchen.

"Coward!" said the housekeeper to herself, trembling.

She could hear the girl's excited tones below. Evidently the household was "up." She felt it strange that Dr. Maturin had left to her the task of penetrating into his shattered room; but it was not the only strange thing that had happened. Where, too, was her dearly loved mistress all this time?

Opening the door of the passage, she saw that the corridor itself was all but dark. She would not go back for a light, however; it would be easy just to put her head into the consulting-room door, and see enough of what had happened to hasten back with the report.

Groping her way slowly along, she came to the closed door. The first thing she noticed when the door was opened was a slight smell, as of scorched iron. The great carved chest was visible only in outline; so were the chairs and bookshelf; yet the knowledge that that antique and massive furniture stood near seemed to make the room more oppressive to her. Then she felt that there was a strong draught; that the air, too, was very cold; and then, yes, she could not be mistaken—raindrops were flying into her face from the window. And, glancing up in that direction, she saw the cause.

At first she started back, for it seemed as though a gigantic arm protruded into the room; it was an arm, too, which shook threateningly, and there seemed to be a multitude of flying streamers attached to it, like fringes on the sleeve. It swayed to and fro in a half circle near the ceiling, but did not advance further into the room. As she stood there near the door, the hiss of this extraordinary arm as it swept violently against walls and ceiling was like the roar of wind in a forest, or of a surf scraping the shore.

What was it? A few moments of doubt and trepidation, and sturdy Mrs. Longstaff understood how the appalling phenomenon had arisen. She realized that it was a huge bough of the elm tree which had fallen through the upper panes, smashing the glass and the wooden framework, and letting all the fury of the storm into the apartment. The leaves were waving wildly on the bough, even in the room itself, and this it was which gave the effect of something menacing in its attitude. Mrs. Longstaff was not a woman of small courage, and, once having made out what caused the mischief, she gave a little sigh of relief, and was retreating to the door again, for she had ventured into the middle of the

room. She found a table partly in the way, and in moving back steered in consequence round by the fireplace and the hearthrug. Suddenly her foot struck against something lying on the floor.

She thought it must be the footstool, and tried to push it away with her foot; but it was too heavy. Stooping down to feel what made the obstacle to progress, her fingers became entangled in some long hair. What could this thing be that was lying on the doctor's laboratory floor? But doctors were mysterious, and it might be some apparatus which she knew nothing about. She passed her hand slowly along the waves of delicate hair, till she came to that which sent a thrill of horror through her veins. It felt exactly like flesh, like a human forehead; and with feverish haste she moved her hand onward and downward.

It *was* flesh; it was a face—the face of some person lying stark and cold on the hearthrug, while the pitiless wind screamed round the walls, and the flakes of cold rain were pelting on the prostrate form. Dr. Maturin's housekeeper was not a nervous subject as a rule. Nevertheless, on this terrifying fact being revealed to her, she rushed to the door, through the passage, and into the drawing-room, and dropped with a scream fainting on the floor.

Dr. Maturin, standing on his own door-step, heard that scream. It was what he expected. He knew that somebody must make the ghastly discovery, and he also knew that whoever made it would be certain to give way to unreasoning terror for a moment. He went round to the outside of the laboratory by a gravel walk skirting the front lawn. He coolly inspected, from a little way off, the fallen elm tree, and saw how the bough had penetrated the room. "Lucky it didn't happen half an hour sooner," he inwardly thought. Evidently, however, all was right. That cry meant that *Something* had been found. What else could it be but what he wanted, what he had plotted?

"It's time for me to go round again to the front door, and be told the news," he said to himself.

Half an hour later the body of Janet Maturin had been brought out of the consulting-room into the living part of the house, and laid reverently down on a sofa in the brilliantly illuminated drawing-room.

After one first wild outburst of grief, Dr. Maturin seemed to have become almost stupefied. He was able to tell the

horrified servants to send for Dr. Snow, a local medical man living close by; but that was all.

And when the doctor arrived, after a brief examination of the pale form extended on the sofa, he turned to Dr. Maturin, and asked—

“How did this happen?”

Dr. Maturin stared vacantly. The question being repeated, he replied—

“How can I tell? I was practicing with anæsthetics. But *that* cannot have harmed her. Was it the storm—lightning? Is she—is she really dead?”

The medical man took him gently from the room.

“All the symptoms are those of suffocation by inhaling some poisonous gas.”

Dr. Maturin listened; then repeated, “Suffocation by inhaling some poisonous gas?” He seemed unable to grasp what the speaker meant.

“A poisonous gas,” the strange doctor reiterated, raising his voice. “I say I think it is a case of suffocation by a poisonous gas. There is the rigidity of the muscles of the hands; the eyes, on being turned to the light, give evidence of convulsions having taken place. Of course, you have tried to resuscitate her? The servants say it is twenty minutes to half an hour since she was found.”

Dr. Maturin remained silent.

“Have you tried measures of resuscitation?” the doctor almost shouted.

“No, none.”

“Good heaven! What are we doing here?”

He rushed back into the drawing-room; Dr. Maturin was left standing in the hall. He seemed dazed. He pressed his hand wearily over his forehead. The housekeeper passed, and looked at him. She was sobbing in a heart-broken kind of way. All the servants seemed to be crying when he saw them. He went into the dining-room. There was nobody there. The large looking-glass over the sideboard reflected back his features, and he glanced into it to see how he looked—whether he was carrying the farce on well. Yes; haggard and distraught—that was what a stranger would say he looked. He felt inwardly satisfied, and flung himself into an armchair with a sigh of relief. As soon as that fool Snow was out of the house, he should feel more composed.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INQUEST AT FREEMANTLE HOUSE.

"I AM afraid an inquest will be necessary."

"Oh, of course."

"It can take place in this house?"

"Yes," Dr. Maturin replied dreamily; "I suppose so."

It was the day after the tragedy, and his interlocutor was Dr. Snow. On the previous evening he had informed Dr. Maturin that he had come to the conclusion that life was extinct. The announcement was almost a mockery. The master of Freemantle House nearly laughed at him as he said it. As if he of all men, having settled on a distasteful course, were likely to leave his work half done.

Dr. Snow had come in now on purpose to mention the subject of the inquest, and he was rather surprised that Dr. Mathurin seemed to take the matter so much as one of course. Generally he had found even strong-minded persons flinch from the dread necessity of a number of strangers, summoned by the law, sitting in judgment on the untimely end of one they loved. He put down Dr. Maturin's apparent apathy to the stunning effects of the blow he had received.

"Poor fellow!" thought the charitable medico. "Poor fellow! Such a lovely woman, and so young! It's a mercy they have no family. He bears it well now; the danger is of a sudden break-down when he realizes his loss. He only half realizes it at present."

It had been rather late, on the evening before, that Mrs. John Betteridge, down at Reigate, had received a telegram, sent in the name of Dr. Maturin, requesting her to come at once, as his wife was "very ill." She did not arrive till ten o'clock, and her husband accompanied her. To see pompous and portly Mr. Betteridge, of Southwold Court, walk up his steps into the hall was more than Dr. Maturin had expected or quite liked. He knew that he would come as soon as he heard of the death of his niece and adopted daughter, but he counted on seeing Mrs. Betteridge first, and letting the *dreadful truth* filter through her to her husband's ears. Dr.

Maturin always found it easier to persuade women of his own view of a case than men.

Need it be said that both were absolutely horrified at poor Janet's terrible and utterly unexpected fate? Many mothers love their offspring less than poor Mrs. Betteridge had loved this, the only daughter ever vouchsafed to her. Oh, if she had only dreamed of danger like this in her son-in-law's house! Why had she not come sooner? "Why," she asked, in a voice choked with sobs, "had she not been sent for?" As for the prosperous City magnate, he, on his part, at first simply broke down altogether, and cried like a child.

Harrowed with agony of mind as he was, or appeared to be, Dr. Maturin had, with copious detail, to explain, as well as he might, how the death had occurred. Then the housekeeper was cross-examined, but was still too much overcome to answer satisfactorily; then the servants generally.

When he could talk at all coherently on the subject, Mr. Betteridge declared it was terrible, most mysterious; he could not understand it. He must telegraph for his brother George the first thing in the morning. George unfortunately had just gone to Yorkshire on business.

Grief such as theirs requires no annalist, however. It is a terrible fact in nature, and is always better imagined than depicted in words. The shock was almost too great, the bitterness too overwhelming.

A telegram *was* sent early next morning to Mr. George Betteridge. But he could not be in London till the afternoon, and the inquest was fixed for midday.

The spacious dining-room at Freemantle House was converted into a temporary court-room, in which the coroner and jury might hold their dismal quest. A small table at one end was placed, with a chair close to it, for the coroner himself. Near to him were ranged the twelve chairs for the jurymen. The large central table was pushed into a corner, and seats for the relatives and witnesses were arranged down the room.

When the time for the inquest arrived, Mr. and Mrs. Betteridge were the first to take their seats. They had slept in the house. They expected that none but the servants or other witnesses would be present; but they were surprised to notice that several people whom they had never seen before were in attendance, until there was, indeed, quite a respectable audience. The fact was that Dr. Maturin had found time to summon several personal friends and Manor End

admirers, not being at all sure beforehand what kind of an audience his wife's relations would make. He had sent an urgent message, among others, to the eminent medical specialist, Dr. Thornton Treadway, an intimate friend, and that celebrated physician was now present. As the jury took their seats, and were duly sworn, there was a rustle of interest through the room, which was not diminished when the coroner said—

"This is a private court, except to witnesses and friends of the deceased. I think it right to say that, because I noticed a crowd outside the gates, who apparently were under the impression that they would be admitted to the inquest."

There was a sympathetic murmur from the jurymen, which was increased when Dr. Maturin himself walked into the room, pale and dejected, yet, as usual, handsome and with an air of dignity. He took his seat without appearing to notice anybody.

A brief explanation of their duties was next given to the jury by the coroner. To everybody's surprise, Dr. Maturin then rose, and in a low voice addressed the coroner.

"This inquiry, sir," he said, "is into the sudden death of my dear wife. I have every reason to believe that my own stupid and deplorable carelessness has led to that death. Some of the witnesses may perhaps feel constrained if they have to give evidence in my presence. I will, therefore, with your leave, absent myself until I am called to tender my evidence."

The coroner looked at Dr. Maturin critically. There was no fault to find with the sentiments he had just uttered; indeed, they were eminently reasonable—nay, more, generously considerate.

"I think that course may be best in the interests of justice, and I thank you, sir, for suggesting it," he replied.

Dr. Maturin bowed sadly, and slowly walked to the door. He had been actuated by several motives in doing as he had done. One certainly was to ensure the jury knowing his own version of the death at the very outset of the inquiry; another to impress them with his own personality, as he knew well all who came within its reach were impressed. If the jury were not sufficiently awestruck by his beautiful house and his philanthropic reputation, why, they should see and hear himself!

Among the persons favorably influenced by the doctor's

little speech, and his departure from the room, was Mrs. Betteridge. From the moment that she knew that Janet was really dead, she had been conscious of vague suspicions, all the more disturbing because they had nothing substantial to go upon. She felt that the presence and advice of her brother-in-law would help her; she knew *he* did not like, was not wrapped up in admiration of, Maturin like her own husband.

Now, however, when Dr. Maturin walked out of the room, she breathed more freely. It was distressing to have to distrust her son-in-law; it came quite as a relief to her to see his unexceptionable behavior, his mournful appearance, and to hear him frankly declare that it was his own carelessness which had killed his wife.

She had little time given to her to realize what a relief it was. The coroner began the inquiry by a request to the jury to follow him into the drawing-room, to view what these functionaries persist in calling the "remains." On their return from this painful duty, the coroner said that evidence of identification would be necessary. It was a mere matter of form; still, it would be necessary.

"A relative of the deceased," he added, "would perhaps be the best witness for this purpose."

Mrs. Betteridge accordingly advanced to the chair which had been placed for witnesses, opposite the jury, and on the other side of the room. She gave her evidence distinctly, but in a low voice. After she had explained how it came about that the dead was to her as a daughter, though actually her niece, but few questions were asked her. After formal identification, however, the coroner said—

"Can you throw any light on the cause of death, Mrs. Betteridge?"

"No. I only know what my son-in-law—what Dr. Maturin has told me,—that he was experimenting——"

"We had better hear that from his own lips, I am afraid," the coroner interrupted. "Had you any reason to suppose that Mrs. Maturin contemplated suicide?"

"Certainly not—none whatever," Mrs. Betteridge said emphatically.

"Thank you; that will do."

"I should like to ask the witness one question," a juror remarked. "Had this lady any reason to think that her

daughter—or, hem! her niece—was unhappy at home; that she was treated unkindly, or anything of that sort?”

The coroner thought it was a legitimate question; Mrs. Betteridge might answer it, he remarked pompously.

“I had no reason to think she was unhappy. I believe Dr. Maturin treated her most kindly.”

“And was she attached to him, ma’am?” pressed the same juryman.

“Undoubtedly she was—very much attached.” Poor Mrs. Betteridge here put her handkerchief to her eyes, and sobbed aloud. She was conducted back to her seat, and another witness called.

This was the housekeeper, Maria Longstaff. Nobody who saw her for the first time as she stood, ready to be sworn, would have known her for the same person who the night before had been pouring out her grief passionately, inconsolably, over the body of her dead mistress. Her character was strong; she was able to recognize the futility of open grief; she could do nothing to aid the woman she had loved by exhibiting her sorrow before the strangers—indeed, she felt that to do so would almost be a profanation of Mrs. Maturin’s memory, which she knew would never fade from her while life lasted. But she would not wear her heart on her sleeve for every daw of a juryman to peck at. So her appearance was that of a very lady-like, composed, and sensible woman, a trifle pale, and with rings under her eyes; but one who would give her evidence well, as she proceeded to do.

Had she known the deceased long? She had been her housekeeper for upwards of a year. Then she knew all the ways of the household? Yes, she did. Did she consider Mrs. Maturin likely to commit suicide? Certainly not (indignantly). She was the last person ever to think of such a thing.

“Why so?” asked the coroner.

“Because she was too good, too religious; and then she was always gay and lively.”

“No traces of hypochondria?”

The housekeeper begged the coroner’s pardon.

“I mean, was she ever depressed?”

“No never——” the witness was beginning. “At least, not until just a few days ago; I noticed her a little depressed *then*.”

"Ah!" exclaimed the coroner. He thought he had a clue. "You *did* notice her depressed. Come now, what was the cause of *that*?"

"Indeed, I don't know, sir. I think my mistress was not well. It was only a passing thing. Next day she seemed as bright as ever."

The coroner looked really disappointed; so did some of the jurymen. The death seemed as far from a satisfactorily sensational explanation as ever.

"It was in the afternoon that the sad event took place," proceeded the coroner. "Now, did you see the deceased in the morning, or at lunch, or at any time in the day?"

"Yes, sir. I saw her in the morning, after breakfast, as I always did."

"What was her state then?"

"Oh, sir, there was nothing to be called a state. She was just as ever—cheerful and kind to everybody, poor thing!" The witness passed her hand hurriedly across her eyes; it was the first sign of feeling that she had allowed herself to show to the coroner and jury.

"Then you know nothing that could account for the death?"

"No, sir. It's a mystery to me altogether."

"I suppose Dr. and Mrs. Maturin lunched together yesterday?"

"Yes, sir."

"And after lunch?"

"They went into the drawing-room."

"I believe you were the first to find the body. At what time was that?"

"I know it was five when I left my room, sir."

"Tell us now how you came to go into Dr. Maturin's consulting-room. I believe that is the name of the apartment."

"I never go into the doctor's part of the house, as a rule," Mrs. Longstaff began; "Dr. Maturin does not allow anybody there.. Yesterday afternoon it began to blow very hard, and I left my own room to go about the house, and see that all the windows were shut. This was soon after luncheon-time. I passed the drawing-room, and I heard the doctor and my mistress talking."

"Were they talking naturally? Were they quarrelling?" the same juror asked who had spoken before.

"To judge by their voices, sir, the appeared to be talking as usual—quite naturally. I heard my poor mistress laughing. That was always her way, poor thing. After I came downstairs again, about ten minutes later, I did not hear any voices, and I noticed the drawing-room door was open. I thought perhaps Mrs. Maturin was in the dining-room, or had gone to her bed-room. Then I went to my own room, but the wind went on blowing fiercer and fiercer, and somehow I became rather nervous. I wondered where my mistress was. I thought I would go to the hall and listen if I could hear her voice." Here the witness paused.

"Go on," said the coroner. "When you got to the hall, did you see anything?"

"Yes, sir, I did. I noticed the doctor. He was standing near the drawing-room door. He was looking towards the passage door, which goes to his own rooms. I looked too, and I saw it was a little way open. Generally it was kept shut."

The interest of the audience in the housekeeper's testimony was evidenced by the deep silence that prevailed. Every head was craned forward to catch each word.

"Did the doctor notice you?" the coroner asked.

"No, sir, he did not. It was getting dark, and I was standing some way off, at the head of the kitchen stairs. I saw him cross over quickly to the passage door and shut it. Then he stood there, close to the door, appearing to be listening. I thought it strange, especially as I did not know where my mistress was. After listening a minute, the doctor came back to the middle of the hall; then there was a crash, which startled me. The doctor ran into the drawing-room, and rang the bell furiously. I answered it, and he told me—it was either me or the housemaid he told—to go into his consulting-room and see what had happened."

"Why did he not go himself?"

"That I cannot say, sir. Oh yes!"—the witness recollected herself suddenly—"he *did* say he would go outside in the garden to see."

"To see what?"

"Well, I suppose to see if a tree was blown down, or a chimney, sir."

"And did he go?"

"Yes; he went out of the front door."

"Then you went into the consulting-room, and found

your mistress? How did you find her? In what position?"

"She was lying on the hearthrug, with her head towards the window, sir. It was almost dark, and, oh dear! I stumbled right up against the poor thing; for you must know, sir, I never expected or dreamed she would be there. I was merely looking at the window, for the elm tree had fallen down just outside, and a great bough of it had broken all the window to pieces."

"And I suppose then you called for assistance?"

"I was so horrified, sir, I rushed out. I believe I fainted. When I came to, they had brought the—the body into the drawing-room, and laid it on the sofa."

"Did you notice Dr. Maturin's demeanor? What did *he* do?"

"He seemed almost beside himself at first—quite frantic. He rushed away to the laboratory, and——"

"Pardon me," another juror here put in; "but the witness now says 'laboratory.' Is that the same as the consulting-room?"

"Yes, it is, sir."

"Go on, then," said the coroner.

"I heard him say, 'What has happened? How has it happened?' then 'Good God! good God!' several times. He seemed quite frantic."

"I think that is all I need ask you. Would the jury like to put any further questions?" asked the coroner.

The inquisitive juror was ready with one to begin with.

"Did you notice any signs of life when you found the body, Mrs.—hem! Mrs. Longstaff?"

"Oh, sir, I was too shocked; it was too dark. I did not really know it *was* my mistress lying there."

"What do *you* think was the cause of death, eh?"

The coroner interrupted. "We shall have medical evidence presently, no doubt. The doctors will be better able to tell us that than this lady."

The juror looked offended, but not crushed. Turning to the witness, he said—

"Don't you think, if you had lifted your mistress up, then and there, she might have been revived—if you had carried her out of the lavatory at once?"

"The laboratory," suggested the coroner.

"Lavatory or laboratory—it's all the same; *she* knows what I mean," *retorted* the juror.

Poor Mrs. Longstaff had not thought of this possibility before. It suddenly rushed upon her mind that perhaps the juryman was right. Perhaps she might have rescued her dear mistress if she had only not given way to that unreasoning panic and run screaming into the drawing-room.

"Oh, sir, I hope that's not true!" she exclaimed. "*Ought* I to have lifted her? I don't know whether I *could* have done it. But the shock was too much; when I found her lying there in the darkness, with the wind and rain all coming in, and me not expecting it! I did not know what I did."

Here the witness broke down finally and hopelessly. In proportion to her resolute suppression of emotion hitherto was her wild hysterical weeping now, as she sank back into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

"Calm yourself!" said the coroner, glancing angrily at the juryman. "I am sure you did all you could do. I have no doubt the doctors will tell us your mistress had been dead some time; anyhow, *you* could not be expected to carry her alone."

There was a sympathetic murmur throughout the room. But as the witness's tears continued, the coroner suggested that if her evidence was wanted again, she could be sent for. Two of the servants led her to the door, and the audience settled down to hear what further disclosures might be forthcoming.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCIENCE AND HUMAN NATURE.

THE next witness called was a very important and a very scientific one. This was Dr. Thornton Treadway, the eminent specialist. He entered the witness-stand—it might more appropriately be termed a seat—with serene composure depicted on every feature, and adjusted his spectacles so as to take a better view of the coroner first, and afterwards of the jury. He looked, in fact, as though, instead of being about to be examined himself, he was going to examine *them* and examine them very thoroughly and very mercilessly. A

"I think you are a Fellow of the Royal Society, and Lecturer in Toxicology to Fawke's and St. Peter's Hospitals?" the coroner asked.

Dr. Maturin had considerably sent the coroner a list of the witness's honors and appointments, so that there was no difficulty about this question. In reply Dr. Treadway merely bowed

"Now, tell us, will you, what you found when you entered Mr. Maturin's laboratory?"

Dr. Thornton Treadway cleared his throat, and settled down to business.

"The first object that I noticed was a tolerably large inductorium, standing upon a table at one side of the room. I was at once struck by its shape, because it is usual for the cylinder to have a subsidiary commutator, which in this case was wanting. I proceeded to examine it——"

A juryman here expressed a wish to be informed what an inductorium was. The coroner would have asked the same question before, only he was afraid the witness and the jury would be surprised at his scientific ignorance. But he was glad the juryman had put the interrogatory.

"An inductorium?" said Dr. Treadway, F.R.S. "Well, perhaps it is more usually known under the name of a Ruhmkorff's Coil. It is, in fact, the same thing as a Ruhmkorff's Coil. It consists primarily of a hollow cylinder in which a bar of soft iron is inserted, surrounded by two helices. One of the helices connects with the poles of a battery, the current of which is alternately opened and closed, while the other serves the purpose of developing the induced current."

A light here broke in upon the coroner.

"You are speaking of a form of electrical machine, I presume?" he asked.

The foreman of the jury, himself a dabbler in science, suggested, "Or a Leyden jar?"

Dr. Treadway eyed the foreman sternly.

"A Ruhmkorff's Coil is more powerful than any battery composed of Leyden jars. It has nothing in common with that mode of developing electrical force. It certainly may be described as a form of electrical machine. I dare say without much difficulty I could make its construction and working plain, but I do not think that course would aid the present inquiry materially."

"Why not?" the coroner asked. "We wish to have ex-

plained to us everything that may have been the active cause in effecting Mrs. Maturin's death. I suppose you are of opinion, Dr. Treadway, that this inductorium *was* the active cause, eh ? ”

“ By no means. It had nothing whatever to do with the death.”

There was something almost approaching a titter among the people in the room. The coroner shrugged his shoulders, and asked why in that case the witness had mentioned the subject at all.

“ I was asked to detail what I saw on entering the laboratory,” the doctor replied, with some asperity.

“ Then I will put it in this way,” said the coroner. “ What in your opinion was the cause of Mrs. Maturin's death ? ”

“ Narcotization by means of a poisonous gas,” the witness answered, promptly and decisively.

“ And how do you suppose that this poisonous gas was—was generated ? ” The coroner looked round on the jury rather proudly, feeling that “ generated ” was quite the right word to use.

“ Dr. Maturin himself will be able to tell you more about that than I can,” the witness replied dryly. “ I am not acquainted with the particular class of experiment that he was engaged in, but I have no doubt that by some accident the vapor which he was using became diffused through the apartment, and in that case any person entering would be liable to be instantly overpowered, and, if not rescued, killed. Shall I explain the apparatus that I found in the room for generating carbonic oxide gas ? ”

“ Certainly, if it was the cause of death.”

“ The proximate cause was narcotization, as I have said before. The apparatus was merely the necessary instrument in producing the narcotization.” Dr. Thornton Treadway was nothing if not severely accurate.

“ Well,” said the coroner, with a sigh of resignation, “ tell us what the apparatus was like.”

Again the witness settled himself down for a scientific lecture to an unscientific audience.

“ My attention was attracted in the first place by a Rupert's condensing stove. This is used to condense the watery vapor which arises from combustion, which is decidedly unfavorable to narcotic action. On opening it, I perceived a considerable quantity of coke which had been recently

inserted ; some was in the form of ash, some half burned, some not burned at all. The flames for consuming the coke were derived from a gas apparatus beneath. The gas so generated would proceed, after passing through the condenser, into a tube, which was connected with an iron chamber standing in one corner of the room. This chamber was large enough to hold a big dog—a mastiff ; perhaps even a sheep. Inside the iron chamber was an inner lining of wood, overlaid with galvanized iron. Under ordinary circumstances, the vapor, after filling this chamber, would pass off by another tube which led out of doors ; so that all precautions had been taken to ensure safety. The chamber itself was practically air-tight. I do not think the stove would be. I hope I have made myself intelligible so far ? ”

The jury in various ways expressed themselves as perfectly satisfied.

“ It is always difficult, and seldom desirable,” the witness went on, “ to explain matters of science in a popular form. But I have no doubt whatever that through some accident, probably the gas being left burning underneath the coke, the poisonous vapor managed to escape and fill the room.”

“ But you said there was a tube to carry the gas out of doors ? ” said the coroner.

“ Yes ; but the door of the iron chamber, as I presume, was probably left open, so that, instead of escaping harmlessly, as it would have done in that case, the vapor found an exit into the apartment.”

“ Did you find the door of this chamber open ? ”

“ No. It was closed when I inspected it. But that was only this morning.”

“ Is this poisonous vapor always produced when coke is burned ? ” asked a jurymen.

“ Coke and charcoal both, when consumed, produce carbonic oxide.”

“ Then, why am I not poisoned ? We burn coke at home.” This question came from a jurymen of plethoric appearance, who had been conscientiously attempting to follow the scientific evidence for some time past, and only partially succeeding.

“ Because *your* carbonic oxide escapes up the chimney, sir,” the specialist answered.

“ What are the effects of this vapor ? Is it instantly fatal ? ” the coroner next asked.

"No, not instantly. It causes rapid anæsthesia, even when only five per cent of an atmosphere is composed of this vapor, and the rest is ordinary air. Convulsive action ensues, with a considerable fall of temperature. The narcotism passes into death, if allowed to continue."

At this point Mrs. Betteridge rose from her seat, and left the room, audibly sobbing. This cool, scientific description of the terrible event was to her horrible in the extreme.

"Is carbonic oxide regarded as an ordinary safe anæsthetic?" the coroner proceeded.

"No anæsthetics are *safe*," replied the man of science. "Some are less dangerous to human life than others. Carbonic oxide was, I believe, discovered to be present in the fumes of the *Lycopodium giganteum* a long while ago. It has since been extensively used as an anæsthetic for the lower creation, not for man."

"Have you used it yourself?"

"Never; I never use anæsthetics in my experiments."

"I have only one more question to ask," the coroner added. "Do you suppose that the deceased entered the room and became overpowered by the vapor before she could cry out?"

"Undoubtedly. The vapor is especially dangerous, because almost inodorous. A person might breathe it without knowing anything about it; it produces none of the irritation of the methyl series of anæsthetic agents."

"Thank you, sir. Any further questions, gentlemen?"

The jury had no questions, and Dr. Thornton Treadway retired to his seat.

Dr. Snow, having been called in directly the catastrophe occurred, was, of course, a necessary witness. He described how he found Mrs. Maturin's body laid on the sofa in the drawing-room; how he at once saw that she was in all probability quite dead, but that he attempted methods of resuscitation, which failed. Did she appear to have suffered at all before death? Oh, no! She appeared as if in a deep sleep, quite placid, and her features wearing a slight smile. To what did *he* attribute the death? To the effects of a poisonous gas.

"Then you agree with Dr. Treadway's evidence?"

"Entirely."

"Thank you, Dr. Snow; that will do," said the coroner.

The next witness was a most important one; in fact the

one whom the jury would have liked to have seen examined before anybody else. For who could possibly know so much about the facts as he? Dr Maturin was called in from the room where he had been waiting. His calm, handsome face was very pale, and his wavy hair looked as if it had not known the comb for some time past. He waited, with his hands crossed before him, patiently for any questions that were to be asked.

"Just as a matter of form," the coroner began, "I must ask you if you are willing to give evidence?"

Dr. Maturin replied, "I am perfectly willing," in a low voice.

"Will you explain, first of all, what occurred on the afternoon of the day of your wife's death—yesterday—as far as you know it?"

"We were in the drawing-room together. My wife had been talking to me about books and other things, and then she went out of the room, without giving me any indication of why she left or where she was going to. If I had known she wished to go to the laboratory, I should have gone with her, as I keep that part of the house, the professional part, quite private."

"What time was this when she left the drawing-room?"

"About half-past four, I should think."

"And it was not till past five that the body was found, according to Mrs. Longstaff's evidence. Did you not miss your wife during all that time? Did you not wonder why she was so long away?"

Dr. Maturin met the coroner's gaze frankly, and replied quite naturally and without hesitation, "To tell you the truth, I *did* wonder where she was. But I was expecting her to return every moment, and so the time must have slipped by. I ought perhaps to mention that I was suffering that afternoon from slight headache and dizziness, and I was glad to keep quiet in the drawing-room."

"But Mrs. Longstaff has told us that you came out of the drawing-room, and that you were walking about the hall; also that she saw you apparently listening at the door leading into the professional part of the house—to the laboratory, in fact."

Dr. Maturin had had no intimation before that Mrs. Longstaff or anybody else had been watching him. This was the first notice he *received* that a human eye had been directed

towards him when he came out of the drawing-room and paced the hall in the gloom of the autumn afternoon, and when he stepped across in inexplicable dread to close the passage door. *Had* he really listened long there? How horribly imprudent! That Mrs. Longstaff was a favorite of his wife's; perhaps a spy on his movements, set on by his wife. He felt indignant with poor Janet on the bare hypothesis: and that housekeeper he positively hated,—the sly eavesdropper!

It said something for the doctor's command of himself that no noticeable delay took place before he replied—

"I can explain that quite easily. Finding that my wife did not return, I certainly did leave my armchair, and go out into the hall. I remember that I noticed the passage door communicating with my consulting-room was open—an unusual circumstance, as I kept it locked as a rule. I shut it, and then listened for a moment or two to the noise the wind was making in that part of the house; the storm just then was very severe. Is there anything else that Mrs. Longstaff said which you would like me to explain?" Dr. Maturin spoke to the coroner, and then turned to the jury.

The latter were much impressed already with the comfort and elegance of the doctor's abode. They were residents in the neighborhood, and knew of him as a man universally respected. They admired the calm dignity with which he volunteered his evidence; they pitied him from the bottom of their hearts for the loss he had undergone. Suspect *him*! Dr. Maturin had calculated with admirable foresight on the advantage which his position and reputation would give him in executing his plot. The jury, with one voice, declared there was nothing whatever in the housekeeper's testimony that required further explanation. They seemed satisfied, completely satisfied, every man of them, and the foreman added—

"I hope Dr. Maturin will now oblige us all by telling us about the apparatus."

There was an approving murmur from his brother jurymen.

Dr. Maturin at once began. "I had for a long time desired to discover a safer and handier means of making patients insensible during surgical operations." (The jury looked at each other with evident satisfaction. Here was a medical witness who actually talked of making people insensible, not of narcotizing, or anæsthetics, or any of those outlandish words.) "I was experimenting lately with carbonic oxide.

Perhaps my friend, Dr. Thornton Treadway, may have told you that a pamphlet about the fumes of the puff-ball first attracted my attention to the matter."

Dr. Treadway here rose and said that he *had* mentioned the subject.

The coroner looked at the jury, and the jury looked back at the coroner.

"We don't remember Dr. Treadway saying anything about a puff-ball," said the foreman, perplexed.

"I gave it its scientific appellation—the *Lycoperdon giganteum*. I distinctly *did* mention it." The eminent specialist seemed surprised at the crassness of the jury.

The jury on their side had lost all interest in a puff-ball which could disguise itself as a *Lycoperdon giganteum*, and turned to Dr. Maturin to hear more of his statement, in which they were all extremely interested.

"Well, it is not of importance *how* I was led to the inquiry," Dr. Maturin proceeded. "It is enough for me to say that I now bitterly regret ever having meddled with these experiments at all; still more that my inexcusable carelessness has had such a terrible result."

The doctor here broke down. The kind-hearted jury on their part begged him to suspend his evidence for five minutes, if he wished. But in a few moments the witness was standing, pale and composed, prepared to go on with his doleful story.

"I had arranged, as I thought, for absolute security in what I did. The iron chamber into which animals were put was air-tight, and the vapor could only escape out of doors. Just before luncheon on the fatal day—yesterday—I had been experimenting, and had filled the chamber with vapor in the usual way. I went hurriedly from the room, and, as I imagine, omitted to turn off the gas-jet underneath the coke; the consequence was that the vapor went on being formed all the time that I was absent, and I can only suppose that more was generated than the chamber could hold or than the escape-pipe could carry off, and that therefore a large quantity returned into the stove, and thence escaped into the room. That is the only way in which I can account for it. I was careless in leaving the gas-jet burning beneath the coke; but even so no bad results would have followed if the escape-pipe had been large enough to carry off the vapor."

"Then, you are sure you closed the door of the chamber?" the coroner asked.

"Quite positive."

"And was the door perfectly air-tight, so that no gas could come through it—through the hinges, for example?"

"No gas could possibly escape that way," the doctor said, with emphasis. "The outer door of the chamber was a slide, like the sash of a window. Besides this, there was an inner door, or screen, running on small wheels, and constructed of a framework of wood, with metal plates affixed. It was impossible that vapor should come past this screen; and, if it did, there was the sliding door in addition. I have frequently tested the efficiency of these two doors."

"These experiments, now," said the foreman of the jury, cheerfully, "I suppose they were what you may call vivisection, eh, doctor?"

"Not at all. I never vivisected in my life," Dr. Maturin replied emphatically; "I hate the system. My object, as I said, was to find a harmless anæsthetic for human use. The animals I experimented on were not vivisected; they were not hurt in any way."

"But they died, some of 'em?" queried the foreman.

"Certainly. Their death was as painless as is that of any human being who passes from the sleep of unconsciousness into the sleep of death. But my experiments were merciful; I take great care of that."

"Thank you, Dr. Maturin. I am glad to hear it."

Dr. Thornton Treadway gave a contemptuous snort. He had listened to this dialogue with disgust. Such ridiculous unscientific nonsense! Why *did* Maturin pander to this foolish prejudice about mercy and so on? The eminent specialist uncrossed his legs, and snorted again; then he recrossed them, and shifted his chair. He was evidently discomposed.

"What, in your opinion, was the cause why the escape-pipe failed to carry off the vapor? Had it ever failed before?" the coroner asked.

It was a question which would occur to any acute man of business, even though he knew nothing whatever about science, as was the case with the coroner. The audience listened attentively to the answer, which Dr. Maturin had ready and waiting.

"*It never failed previously,*" he replied. "I attribute its

failure in this instance to the fact that the coke had been burning much longer than ever before—all the afternoon, in fact. Also to the wind, which was beating against that side of the house, and which might very probably drive the fumes back into the chamber, and so into the stove."

It was felt that the answer was quite satisfactory. Dr. Thornton Treadway nodded his scientific approval of the hypothesis. He himself had been puzzling over the same question of the escape of gas into the room, and had come to the conclusion, which he had stated to the jury, that Dr. Maturin had left the door of his anæsthetic chamber open. But now he felt inclined to favor the theory of a counter-current preventing the vapor making its exit into the open air. He took out his note-book, and made a note of the facts: here was an interesting field for future experiment, when he should have the time. He forgave Maturin for his anti-vivisection heresy.

"The jury, no doubt, will wish to see the laboratory, and can inspect the chamber," the coroner remarked. "I wish to ask you, Dr. Maturin, whether your wife was in the habit of visiting the professional part of your house?"

"Not often; I cannot understand why she went there," the doctor replied, without hesitation.

"Did you keep the passage door generally locked?"

"Yes. I did not allow the servants to go in, except to dust in my presence. I was afraid of their meddling with things."

"Had you wife a key of this door?"

"Oh, no! But I very often left the key in the lock, and must have done so on this day."

Dr. Maturin's examination thus ended, and he went back to a seat with the same placid, sorrowful face that he had worn all through.

Some unimportant evidence, of the housemaid and footman, followed. These servants could only say that they were not allowed in the doctor's own rooms; that the door of the passage was generally locked; and that they had noticed nothing whatever unusual on the day of the tragedy, beyond the crash of the falling tree late in the afternoon, which startled them all.

"Do you wish any more evidence, gentlemen?" the coroner asked; adding, "I think the cause of death is pretty plain."

One juror, who had not spoken hitherto, now whispered to the foreman, who in turn whispered to the coroner.

"Yes," said the latter aloud, "I have no doubt Mrs. Longstaff will not mind answering one more question."

Mrs. Longstaff was duly summoned once more.

"Did you go about the house much?" the juryman asked.

"Yes, sir; I am frequently up and down," the witness replied.

"Well, then, perhaps you can tell me whether you remember about the passage door — was the key usually in it or not?"

Dr. Maturin looked at the inquiring juror. The question, he felt, was rather an awkward one. A good deal turned on what Mrs. Longstaff would say in reply; for if the key was never left in the door, how could his wife have gone through on that day without his knowledge? His face, however, wore the same patient, unruffled look as before, as he turned to listen to the housekeeper's reply.

Mrs. Longstaff thought for a few moments, during which there was silence through the large room.

"I don't rightly remember," she said at length.

"Have you *ever* seen that key in the door?" the juror persisted, leaning forward.

"Yes, sir, I have; but how many times I can't say."

Dr. Maturin was, as a matter of fact, greatly relieved at this answer. So was the coroner. The rest of the jury said they required no more evidence. They were accordingly conducted to the doctor's laboratory, and the nature of the apparatus which had produced such a terrible result was explained by Dr. Thornton Treadway, whose scientific zeal was fully aroused. It is probable, indeed, that he quite forgot that the laboratory was not a lecture-room, and the jury an audience of attentive pupils; it is quite certain that he regarded Dr. Snow's interposition, to point out the spot where the body was found, as an unwarrantable distraction from the subject of real interest, namely, the action of vapor generated from coke on human beings.

When the jury were again seated on their chairs in the big dining-room, and the coroner was seated in his, the final stage was reached. The coroner dispensed with all elaborate summing-up. He was a man of few words at any time; now the evidence had made everything that seemed mysterious to start with so abundantly plain, that he really did not feel justified in detaining the jury by superfluous comments. The *jury seemed to share* the coroner's view. They did not re-

quire to consult in private, they said. They merely wished to communicate with each other where they were for a minute or two, and then, the foreman said, they felt sure they would arrive at a unanimous verdict.

So the strange, unwonted spectacle in Dr. Maturin's handsome dining-room was now witnessed of a dozen sober citizens putting their heads together, and talking in loud whispers with great animation, drawing their chairs close round the foreman, the nucleus of the little throng. Those outside stood up and bent over to hear what the foreman said; and the audience waited and wondered and looked on in silence, while the coroner himself leaned his elbows on the table which stood in front of him.

Presently the standing-up jurymen sat down, the heads that had been near together separated, there was silence but for the settling down in their places, and the foreman said they were all agreed.

"What is your verdict, gentlemen?"

"That the deceased met her death by misadventure, owing to the accidental escape of a poisonous gas; and we find that no blame attaches itself to any one." After a pause, the foreman went on, "The jury have requested me to convey to Dr. Maturin their deep sympathy with him in the terrible loss which he has sustained."

Dr. Maturin murmured his thanks, almost inaudibly, and the grim function ended.

As the bereaved widower was seeing his friend and old colleague, Dr. Thornton Treadway, off at the hall door, the latter said—

"You needn't have given us that stab, Maturin."

"What stab?"

"About vivisection."

"Excuse me; I'm too merciful. I can't endure pain."

"Tut, tut, tut! Grossly unscientific. You'll never make a first-rate physician, Maturin. You're too namby-pamby—have too many bowels, so to speak. I don't like to be hard on you just now, of course. But I tell you what, a medical man ought to be able to flay his dearest friend alive without flinching, if science requires it—he ought indeed."

Dr. Maturin only shook his head, and wrung his brother doctor's hand. Going slowly back into his now deserted hall, he thought to himself, "My dearest friend? Who is that?"

He sat down in one of the hall seats. He *had* no friends, he thought; only acquaintances. Friendship requires a surrender of will, and he never surrendered that.

"Janet *was* my dearest friend. I really think she loved me—what Bacon calls an *idolum tribus*; few escape it. 'Flay my dearest friend,' Treadway said. Well, I would rather do that than flay a rabbit. Yet these scientific fellows do it every day. Heartless brutes!"

His mental soliloquy was interrupted by the sound of a cab driving quickly up to the front door, followed by an impatient pull at the bell. Then footsteps ran briskly up the steps, and stamped outside on the mat. Whoever the visitor was, he was in a hurry.

One of the traits about Dr. Maturin which insensibly impressed people with his greatness was that he never stood on ceremony. If he saw anything that wanted doing immediately, he did it himself. In this instance he did not stop to consider that a servant would come upstairs in a minute and open the door. He stepped up to it, and briskly opened it—on Mr. George Betteridge!

The latter was evidently surprised and somewhat dumbfounded by the sudden appearance of Dr. Maturin. All the way down from Liverpool—where he had been when the terrible news of Janet's death reached him—he had over and over again accused Maturin of foul play in his own mind. The death came as a dreadful shock; but it also came as the confirmation of suspicions which we saw in active operation on the day when he went down to Reigate. He had driven straight up from Euston to Freemantle House hoping to be in time for the inquest. He had made up his mind to give evidence, and to tell the whole story of Janet's interview with him, and of Dr. Maturin's unsuccessful attempt to cajole his wife into parting with the five thousand pounds.

"How do you do, Mr. Betteridge?" Dr. Maturin said, with perfect suavity of manner.

He did not offer his hand, having an instinct that Uncle George would have refused it.

The able solicitor wanted to know, above everything else, how the death had taken place—why it had taken place. But Dr. Maturin was just the last person from whom he would have sought information.

"Is the inquest going on?" he said, in a husky voice.

"It is just over."

"Adjourned?"

"No; I am glad to say it is entirely over."

Mr. George Betteridge would not trust himself to say what he felt. He paused for a moment, undecided. Then a bright thought struck him.

"I suppose my brother and sister-in-law were present?"

"Oh, yes; they are in the house now."

"I should like to see them; can I?"

"By all means; you will find them in the billiard-room, I think."

Mr. George Betteridge paid off his cab, and was conducted through the hall by Dr. Maturin.

"How—how on earth did this awful event take place?" he could not help asking. He should like to know, at all events, what the husband's own account was. There could be no harm in a direct question.

Dr. Maturin paused at the door of the billiard-room, and said calmly—

"I killed her myself."

Uncle George's experience of men had been considerable. But he had never before been the recipient of a confession of unjustifiable homicide from the lips of a murderer. He recoiled a step; then he said—

"What! you confess it?" The man, he thought, must certainly be mad.

As for Dr. Maturin, he had gained one piece of knowledge that he was in search of. He had ascertained beyond a doubt, from Uncle George's exclamation, that the latter really suspected him of murdering his wife, or, at all events, considered him capable of the deed. He had laid the trap deliberately, and the solicitor had walked into it. He now proceeded to lay another.

"There has been a circumstance I cannot too much regret," he went on, in a dreamy kind of a way: "Janet knew my wishes, and disobeyed them. But," he added, abruptly changing his tone, and turning his keen gray eyes questioningly on Mr. Betteridge, "you know all that, I think?"

Uncle George was bewildered by the apparent frankness of his interlocutor. Why, Dr. Maturin had not only admitted the murder, but also seemed to admit that obstinacy on the part of his wife in the money affair had been the cause!

"Janet told me of the money dispute—yes," he blurted out.

"Ah!" said the doctor. He had gained what he wanted.

He thought it might be as well to have a confirmation of the fact that Janet had really told her uncle about the five thousand pounds quarrel, from the uncle himself, and the latter had obligingly laid bare his mind for inspection. Dr. Maturin was satisfied. He had a horror of not knowing exactly where he stood, and he knew now. It was quite easy for him to go on in a surprised, injured tone. "What *can* any money dispute have to do with such an awful event as this? When I said she disobeyed my wishes, what did you think I meant? I meant that she must have gone into my consulting-room, though I had often asked her not to do so. I told you there was a circumstance I regretted; but it was not, as you chose to think, a miserable dispute about money. It was the fact that I had been carrying on experiments, injudiciously perhaps, in my own professional apartments, which have ended in this terrible disaster—the accidental death of my dear wife."

Mr. George Betteridge had now abandoned the idea that Dr. Maturin was confessing a murder to him, or that he was mad. On the contrary, he felt that he had been played with, and that Dr. Maturin was as sane and cunning as ever he had been before. He determined to be doubly on his guard.

"Did the jury bring in a verdict of accidental death?" This was the last question he would ask.

"Yes; they have done so."

"Then let me into the room. I wish to see my brother."

The two men went in together. Dr. Maturin had no idea of allowing Janet's uncle to poison the mind of his father-in-law if he could prevent it.

Mr. John Betteridge was sitting near the window when they entered, trying or pretending to read a newspaper. Mrs. Betteridge was in a chair by the fire. At sight of her husband's brother, her tears broke forth afresh.

"Is it not terrible?" she sobbed out, as he kissed her.

"Terrible indeed! Poor dear little Janet!"

He turned and shook hands with his brother. The eyes of the two met. All that George said was—

"You remember what I told you; how I warned you at Reigate?"

"Yes; and I don't wish to hear anything of the matter again!" John Betteridge exclaimed, almost savagely.

It was at this precise point that his brother's long-suppressed indignation burst forth and bubbled over uncontrollably.

"What! Not wish to hear—when she was almost more than a daughter to you? It's shameful and abominable!"

"I am surprised at your language," John Betteridge replied, with pompous rebuke in his tones. "I tell you, I blame Maturin as much as anybody can do for what he calls his experiments; but the thing was evidently an accident—so the scientific people say—and the jury have brought in a verdict to that effect. I have no reason whatever to disbelieve that verdict, and I don't believe that you have either."

"Mr. Betteridge had better speak out plainly if he accuses me of murdering my wife," Dr. Maturin here interposed. "Perhaps he has some evidence besides a mere paltry disagreement about money matters, which I should be the first to acknowledge."

Mrs. Betteridge rose from her seat in surprise and dismay. She had the usual feminine dislike to hearing things spoken about in strong language. Murder! A horrible word! And she had heard nothing before about this money quarrel, if there had been one. Before she could put a question, however, Uncle George had turned to her husband, and burst out—

"How do you expect me to speak freely before that fellow?"

"Fellow!" exclaimed the doctor, pale with suppressed rage. "Take care, sir! You no doubt call this an uncle's solicitude for his niece. The law has an unpleasant habit of calling it defamation of character."

Before the solicitor could retort, his brother interposed, with severe displeasure in his tones—

"George, I am really astonished! This is Maturin's own house. I cannot—I will not stay and hear him abused. I will give you time to recover yourself—to recover yourself." John Betteridge, conscious of having behaved with some dignity, walked out of the room.

"Emily," said Uncle George, turning to his sister-in-law, and disregarding Dr. Maturin's presence altogether, "you see how I am placed. If my brother won't stir in this matter, I have no right to. Tell me if *you* believe it was an accident?"

Mrs. Betteridge groaned in spirit; then looked across at Dr. Maturin in a frightened way. At last she said—

"He is my son-in-law, you know, George. Poor Janet loved him, and I am sure he always seemed attached to her. The verdict was that it was an accident. Pray do not bring

more trouble on us—or disgrace. We cannot raise darling Janet from the dead!”

Mr. George Betteridge wrung her hand in silence. He felt the force of what she said. He knew he was in the presence of accomplished facts, incapable of being reversed. He passed Dr. Maturin without speaking, and went gloomily out into the hall. So he left the house. Figuratively, he shook the dust of it from his feet. But he had loved his niece very dearly, and he determined that he would yet run Maturin to earth; he would think what real evidence there was against him.

CHAPTER IX.

JANET'S NAMESAKE.

THE “Manor End Tragedy” having taken place in the dull season, when Parliament was not sitting, and the Long Vacation brooded over the law courts, the newspapers had plenty of room for lengthy descriptions of the event. It created, as might have been expected, an immense sensation, which lasted a week. At first the affair was called the “Manor End Mystery,” but after the inquest the newspaper writers could hardly adhere to this title, and they christened it a tragedy instead. Horrifying accounts of all the circumstances surrounding the event were printed in the very largest type. The reason of the interest taken in the case was obvious. The social position of the chief actors and sufferers in it alone sufficed to invest it with a peculiar attraction; then Mrs. Maturin was stated to be both young and lovely, and her husband was described as “a gentleman universally respected in the neighborhood for his high character and benevolence of heart.” The death was sudden and startling. If it were a crime, it was one without any apparent motive. If an accident, how terrible an accident!

But all idea of a possible crime having been committed was given up when the proceedings at the inquest, and above all, the verdict recorded, came to be known. It was a disappointment to have to abandon a theory which contained in it such *infinite possibility* of pleasurable excitement, but there was *really no foothold* for continued suspicion. The newspapers

spoke of Dr. Maturin—whose name none of them had heard before the fatal event—as the “eminent philanthropist,” and the tale of his wealth, his luxurious abode, and his reputation were soon common property to all who cared to read about them.

Before the verdict and the inquest, the local journals, scenting carrion from afar, had merely stated the facts, with such amplifications as ingenuity suggested, and “reserved their judgment” on the cause of the death. It was curious to see how exactly their opinion coincided with that of the jury when the verdict had once been pronounced. It showed a remarkable openness of mind on the part of the gentlemen who were good enough to comment on the affair; though possibly the wish to avoid a costly contest with the doctor over an action for libel may have also had something to do with the unanimity with which the theory of accident was accepted and proclaimed. But it was a grievance to journalism that the affair should be ended so soon. Why could not the coroner have at least adjourned the inquiry? As it was, the account of the death appeared, very briefly, one morning in the “great dailies,” with extensive additions in the evening papers; the report of the inquest was published the next morning; and two days later the funeral took place. For the interests of sensation the affair was too miserably curtailed. After a week, there was really no more excuse for going on writing about the “Manor End Tragedy,” and the writing accordingly stopped.

There was certainly nobody among the outside public who thirsted so eagerly to know exactly what had happened at the inquest as Mr. George Betteridge. When he left Freemantle House he thought perhaps he should find somebody who would tell him the facts. He strolled into a hairdresser's shop, not a quarter of a mile off, and sat down. But he was not enlightened. The barber knew all about the event itself, but nothing about the details of the coroner's inquiry. It was impossible, consistently with his dignity, to go back to the house and seek an interview with one of the servants. He was obliged to wait till next morning.

Directly his newspaper arrived, Mr. George Betteridge read every word of the four columns about the inquest. Considering what the evidence had been, he could find no fault with the verdict; and he was lawyer enough to feel *that even if he had given evidence himself, there would have*

been nothing in what he could have told the jury to warrant a different conclusion.

He read the account over again. He knew nothing of Mrs. Longstaff, the housekeeper, but it struck him that he would like to see and speak to her. She had evidently been fond of her mistress; her testimony, too, was not over-favorable to Maturin. He sent a note to her at once, asking her to visit him at his city office at any time convenient to herself, but the sooner the better. That day Mr. Betteridge went about his solicitor's work with a terrible gloom on his soul. He felt that he owed it to poor Janet's memory to try to track out the mystery; but for the life of him he could not see what clue there was to follow. If Mrs. Longstaff could tell him nothing important, he would go to Dr. Thornton Treadway, and see what *he* thought of the case.

Contrary to his usual custom, the worthy solicitor stayed at his business place till six that evening; and it was fortunate he did so, for shortly before that hour "a lady" was announced by his clerk as wishing to see him, and on being asked her name she gave it as Mrs. Longstaff.

When she was ushered into Mr. George Betteridge's inner room, she struck him as a being really very ladylike for a housekeeper. He asked her to sit down. Then he thanked her for coming to see him so soon. He had not expected her, he said, till next day.

"I suppose," he added, "you received my letter early in the afternoon?"

"Yes, sir; and I was able to come off at once, as I was not wanted at the house. And knowing you to be a relative of my dear mistress, I thought it my duty not to lose any time."

"It is very good of you—quite right of you." Mr. George Betteridge was very favorably impressed with his visitor's manner. "I wanted to see you, of course, about this terrible affair. My niece's death was a dreadful shock to me. I was exceedingly attached to her." He seemed to feel the light of the lamp a little strong, and shaded his eyes for a moment or two. "I believe, Mrs. Longstaff, you also were much attached to her?"

"She was the kindest mistress anybody could have. Oh, sir, I would have done anything to prevent it! Why ever *she went into that* dreadful trap—for a trap it was, *what-ever anybody may say*—passes me. And to think that I was

walking about the house, doing nothing but shut windows and such like, when if I had just gone in there I could have saved her precious life! Oh, dear, dear!" Mrs. Longstaff, having found at last a really sympathetic auditor, broke out crying, and rocked herself to and fro in her chair.

The able solicitor quite approved of these unprofessional signs of emotion. He even wiped a tear from his own eye. But he must remember why he had sent for Mrs. Longstaff; it was to get any information bearing on the cause of death that she might happen to possess. So, after allowing her a minute or two for her grief, he said—

"Your feelings do you a great deal of credit. But I want you to compose yourself. I want to ask you a few questions."

Mrs. Longstaff had recovered her usual look of composure and self-control. She sat and waited for the questions. She was determined not to give way again.

Mr. George Betteridge leaned over toward her, and said in a low, impressive voice—

"Do *you* understand this death, Mrs. Longstaff?"

"No, sir; I can't say I do."

"Well, then, I will ask you another question. Do you think your mistress was happy with her husband—with Dr. Maturin?"

Mrs. Longstaff was always just, as we saw at the inquest. She replied—

"Yes, sir; on the whole I think she was very happy. She had a happy disposition."

"She had. You never heard them quarrelling about money?"

"I never heard them quarrel at all."

"Would you have heard them if they had?"

"I can't say. I might have done so."

"You were often with Mrs. Maturin; you would have known if she was unhappy?"

"Yes, sir; and I don't think she was—at least, not generally. She was always so bright and merry."

"Not generally, you say. Now, you told the jury, I see, that your mistress was depressed a few day before her death. Try and recollect if it was not ten days or a fortnight ago that you noticed this."

Mrs. Longstaff was surprised. It *was* exactly a fortnight since *she* had observed Janet looking dull, and not well.

and it was then she drove off to see Mrs. Vane, she recollected.

Mr. George Betteridge was eying her with interest.

"I see you *do* remember," he said.

"Well, sir, my mistress certainly did seem unwell, and less lively than usual, just the time you mention. It was the day she drove to Finchley, to visit Mrs. Vane, a great friend of hers. It was the Thursday; I recollect quite well."

"Did she tell you why she was depressed?"

"Oh no, sir."

"Now about this mysterious room—this laboratory," the solicitor went on. "Tell me, was your mistress in the habit of going there?"

"Occasionally she did, but not often."

"How long has Dr. Maturin been trying these experiments—do you know that?"

"Not long, sir. I remember the apparatus being brought into the house, by the doctor's own entrance. It can't have been more than a fortnight ago."

"After or before you noticed your mistress depressed?"

Mrs. Longstaff thought. "About the same time, sir. I can't say precisely."

The solicitor made a mental note—"N.B. *About the same time.*"

"Did he keep animals in the room to operate on?"

"No, sir; in the stable. I heard in the house that John, the coachman, had one or two rabbits which the doctor had ordered him to get."

"Had he ever practised on animals before, that you know of?"

"I never heard of his doing so; but then, I had not been with Mrs. Maturin very long."

"And was this the only apparatus—this one for making animals insensible—that you remember being introduced into the house?"

"He did have other machines brought in, I believe, before that. There was some electrical machine, I think. I have heard that he had workmen in his room once or twice, fitting up things."

Mr. George Betteridge thought a little. Then he took up the newspaper, and ran his eye down the report of the *inquest*,

"Ah! I knew there was something else I wanted to ask you, Mrs. Longstaff!" he exclaimed. "You described to the jury how you saw Dr. Maturin go out into the hall, shut the passage door communicating with his own part of the house, and then stand listening there. Did this strike you as strange, or not?"

Mrs. Longstaff looked her interrogator full in the eyes, and said, "If you ask me, sir, it did strike me as very strange—very strange indeed. And it's a relief your asking me, sir, and my being able to tell you like this, because I did not say anything about it to the jury, and I was sorry afterwards that I did not. But how could I, sir?"

"Well, why not? If you noticed anything, or thought anything that occurred suspicious, you had a perfect right to inform the coroner and the jury about it. Indeed, you were bound to do so—to tell the whole truth, you know." The solicitor paused. "Why did you not tell them, Mrs. Longstaff?"

"Because, sir, I could not have said anything definite; I only observed Dr. Maturin's manner."

"Ah! his manner. What about his manner? Was that different from usual?"

"It certainly *was* different."

"How different—how different?" the solicitor asked impatiently.

"I can't explain. It made an impression on my mind—as if he had done something, and was listening to hear——"

"If everything had gone off properly, eh?" Mr. George Betteridge had drawn his chair close to his visitor's, and asked this last question in a low whisper of expectancy.

Inflexibly just Mrs. Longstaff shook her head, and said—

"No, not that. But he was listening to *something*, and I don't believe it was what he said yesterday—that he was hearkening to the noise of the storm. If that was it, why did he shut the passage door first?"

"Why, indeed?"

"And he shut it so hastily, sir, as if he was frightened. And there was a curious anxious look on his face, sir. Altogether his movements and appearance made a strange impression on me. I can't describe it."

"You have described it admirably. Then that was all that you noticed?"

"Yes; for *directly* after the crash of the tree falling down

came, and Dr. Maturin ran across into the drawing-room, and rang the bell, which I answered."

"Did he seem in his usual state then?"

"Yes, sir; only wanting to know what the noise was."

"H'm! By-the-by, Mrs. Longstaff, is there no servants' bell in the hall at Freemantle House?"

"No, sir."

"Why could he not call out? Why should he go into the drawing-room?"

"That I don't know, sir."

"Is there anything else that you would like to tell me? any other impressions that you formed, and which you would like to reveal to one who has a natural interest in knowing, like myself?"

Mrs. Longstaff thought, but could not say there was.

"This Mrs. Vane that you said Mrs. Maturin drove to Finchley to see, on that day when she seemed depressed, is Colonel Vane's wife, I presume?"

"Yes; a great friend of my poor mistress, sir. They seemed like sisters, almost, whenever Mrs. Vane came over to Manor End."

"Was she at the inquest?"

"No, sir. I don't know why not. She was expecting to be ill, I remember; but not yet. Perhaps she had not heard about the dreadful event. I was wondering why she had not come."

When the able solicitor had dismissed his visitor, after taking the address which she said would always find her—she would be leaving Freemantle House in a week for good, she said—he sat down in his chair and pondered. He continued the process of meditation all the way home, and over his comfortable bachelor meal in the evening. Mrs. Longstaff's evidence had served to increase his suspicions of Maturin. He felt that the fact of the experiments having been probably begun *after* the money dispute was a circumstance that had a bad look. At the same time, this was not quite certain, and it might be a coincidence, and no doubt Maturin had been in the habit of experimenting with other kinds of apparatus in his laboratory before. Beyond this, there was merely the impression on Mrs. Longstaff's mind which had been created by seeing the doctor watching at the passage door. Mr. Betteridge imagined to himself Dr. Maturin *accused of murder*, and then tried to estimate what effect

such evidence would have on any average jury. He felt that really there was no definite case at all against Maturin, even with what he himself knew about the money quarrel.

"I shall go and see Treadway," he said aloud, over his cup of after-dinner coffee. "Perhaps that Mrs. Vane might be of use, too."

Mrs. Vane, however, was not just now in a position to be of much use to anybody. Her baby was about to be born, and was, indeed, hourly expected when the news arrived at Finchley of Mrs. Maturin's death. This was the reason why she had not attended the inquest; although Dr. Maturin, not knowing the facts, was wondering why Mrs. Vane had not come.

The unexpected intelligence agitated her terribly. She begged of her husband to be allowed just to drive over to Manor End to see poor Janet's body, and ask a few questions, and return at once. Colonel Vane called in their medical man, who peremptorily forbade any such expedition. It was then agreed that the colonel should go over to Freemantle House, and, if possible, inquire from Dr. Maturin himself how the horrible event could have happened.

Colonel Vane arrived at the house a few hours before the inquest was timed to begin. He was surprised to see the throng at the gates. He felt that he was in the middle of an excitement of some kind, and his spirits rose. When he knocked at the door, and asked to see Dr. Maturin, and was told that Dr. Maturin could not see anybody—he was too unwell from the shock,—the colonel's spirits fell again.

"Just tell him it's Colonel Vane, will you? I've called with deep condolences, and all that, from my wife and myself, and—and I should be very much obliged if the doctor would see me for a second or two."

Even this message failed to draw Dr. Maturin. "He would be glad if the colonel could attend the inquest that afternoon," he sent word. After making a few inquiries, Colonel Vane had to depart about as wise as he had come. He was aggrieved that such a jolly fellow as the doctor, such a "chum" of his own, should deny him an audience. He would have stopped for the inquest, but he felt bound to keep his promise to his wife, and get back to Finchley by lunch-time.

Mrs. Vane was not half as surprised as the colonel had been at his *not being* admitted to Dr. Maturin's presence.

"Unwell from the shock! Well, I should think he ought

to be!" was her comment. "And they say it was an accident of some kind. Horrible! My poor dear Janet Maturin! Shall I never see you again, or hear your sweet laugh? How the children will miss you, too! Oh, I cannot realize it!" Mrs. Vane, strong-minded as she was, burst into silent tears.

In the quiet of her own room there recurred to her all that Janet had said to her on the last occasion of their meeting. She recollected distinctly how she had noticed that Janet was unhappy at home, or, at least, how she thought she noticed it, and how she was dissuaded from the thought by the latter's own vehement assertion of her complete contentment. Then there also flashed across her mind that curious question as to "Mr. Peabody," and about his committing a murder. She pondered over that question, without arriving at any clue to its explanation. Mr. Peabody had been a great philanthropist. Dr. Maturin had the reputation of being a philanthropist. Mr. Peabody certainly had never committed homicide. Had Dr. Maturin done so? She felt that there was a mystery hanging over that innocent question of Janet's, but one which only filled her with a vague suspicion.

She did not know—she could not know—anything of that domestic dispute of which Uncle George had cognizance. But in her weak, sickly, and anxious state she puzzled over the interpretation of as much of the mystery as had come within her reach—puzzled and grieved, and grieved and puzzled, without end. And so inauspiciously approached the birth-season of the child who was to be named, if a girl, after Janet herself; it had been her dead friend's last request.

On the evening of the very day on which the inquest took place at Freemantle House, Mrs. Vane's youngest infant saw the light, and it *was* a girl. Colonel Vane was rendered gloomy by the event. He disliked girls. They had to be "kept," unless married, unlike boys, who could be turned out at sixteen to shift for themselves almost entirely. But his wife rejoiced at the feminine gender of the new addition to her family. There were only three girls already; and now Mrs. Vane saw with pleasure the possibility of Janet Maturin's wish being carried out.

A fortnight later, she told Colonel Vane that she would *like to have the child christened "Janet Vane."*

"After poor Mrs. Maturin, I suppose?" the colonel said.

"Well, it's a pretty name, and it might please Maturin."

"I don't want to please Dr. Maturin at all," his wife replied, with some sharpness. "That's the very last thing I should dream of doing."

"Well, just as you like," the colonel said. "Only if you want to name the child after Mrs. Maturin, it's no earthly good simply calling her Janet. You'll have to christen her 'Janet Maturin'—'Janet Maturin Vane.' 'Pon my soul, it sounds not half bad, just like an old family name—so aristocratic."

"I would rather not call her any name at all than give her 'Maturin' as one of her names, poor little pet."

"You are prejudiced against Maturin, my dear. A capital fellow!"

"I certainly don't believe in the man, if that's what you mean by being prejudiced against him."

"Well, but suppose you call this br—this child 'Janet,' and nothing else, no other Christian name. What's there to show that she's named after 'Janet Maturin' more than any other Janet, I should like to know? It's a common name enough. A fellow who wanted to do me an honor wouldn't call his boy 'Henry; he'd call him 'Henry Vane.' That's my view."

"If other people don't know who the child is named after, we shall know, at any rate. And she will know herself when she gets bigger." Mrs. Vane did not feel equal to long arguments just yet; she was aware, besides, that her husband never insisted on his own ideas when they came into collision with hers in the sphere of domestic management.

After a time the christening took place, and Mrs. Vane had her way. The child, which was a rosy, blue-eyed little cherub, went into the church anonymous, and came out again as "Janet Vane."

"Somehow it does not seem to me like my own child," Mrs. Vane said; "it seems more like poor Janet Maturin's. A fancy it will be like her in face too" (this was a very imaginative forecast at the early age of six weeks). "It has ~~her~~ eyes exactly. I only hope it won't resemble her in one way—be silly enough to marry a man just because he is called fascinating, and appears good, which he isn't. Oh, Janet dear, if you are an angel, be near us sometimes! Help me to protect your foster-child through life!"

CHAPTER X.

DR. MATURIN ATTENDS A PUBLIC MEETING.

THREE weeks having now elapsed since the catastrophe at Freemantle House, there was nothing surprising in the fact that Dr. Maturin was taking the air, dressed in deep black. He felt inclined to shun observation. It was a Wednesday afternoon, and at half-past three the street-lamps were already being lighted, for there was a growing fog to add to the natural gloom of the time of year, late in November. After leaving his house, he went by the most quiet roads in the direction of the main street of the little town; and as his coat-collar was turned up, and his hat tilted over his eyes, it is no wonder that but few passers-by recognized him.

It was not altogether with a desire to have out-of-door exercise that he had determined on taking this walk. He had noticed in the papers, and, moreover, had seen from printed advertisements left at his house, that on this afternoon a meeting was to be held in the parochial rooms, to discuss the whole question of the acquisition of the twenty-four acres of park which were known by the name of the Priory Fields, or the Abbey Estate.

Now, Dr. Maturin's bereavement had, of course, been too recent to allow him to take any public part in these proceedings. This was so well understood that no request had been made to him to appear on the platform, or to take the chair, as would certainly have been the case under ordinary circumstances. No public-spirited enterprise could be considered to be launched with any prospect of success unless the respected medical philanthropist of Manor End, the rich man who seemed to regard his riches as a trust from Heaven for the good of his fellow-men, took a leading part in it. When he first heard of the scheme, Dr. Maturin had expressed warm approval of it, and, as we know, he would have given a handsome, an overwhelmingly handsome, donation some time back, had it not been for unforeseen obstacles, including the *unfortunate interruption* to philanthropy caused by his wife's death. The promoters of the park scheme were sure that in

a month or two after the funeral Dr. Maturin would again take up the matter, and announce a subscription; at least, this was what they hoped for. They did not care to face the possibility of the doctor being so utterly unnerved by the tragedy that he would leave the neighborhood, and take no more interest in its affairs.

The parochial rooms, Dr. Maturin knew, were long and narrow and badly lighted. At the end away from the platform there was a gallery, and he thought that if, during the speeches, he were to slip quietly in and sit in the shadow, he would be unnoticed by his acquaintances at the other end of the room. If he were noticed, he would walk out. He wished very much to hear what was said.

"That donkey of a churchwarden, Clarke, is sure to be there, talking nonsense," he said to himself. "Colonel Wood, I suppose, will be in the chair, as I can't be, confound him! Posing as a philanthropist, no doubt. Thank heaven! his oratory is beneath contempt. They'll miss my speaking. The sharpest-sighted fellow of the lot is Sweeting, the grocer. I must put a pillar between me and Sweeting. If he notices my presence, he's safe to ask me to favor them with a few words.' Nothing he likes so much as putting himself prominently forward."

As he walked down in the deepening dark, and through the fog, which seemed to come on in waves of stifling vapor, he again thought, as he had done over and over again since Janet's death, of Uncle George, and what *he* would say when the subscription was announced.

For Dr. Maturin was now absolute master of his wife's fortune, and revelled in the idea. But the consciousness of power seldom led him into precipitate action. He would walk warily. He would, at the least, allow a considerable time to elapse before he came down with a donation which he intended should clinch his title to the everlasting gratitude and the votes of suburban North London. By going to the meeting he would be able to judge in what stage the project now was, and the amount of public enthusiasm for it. Possibly it would come to nothing. He did not intend to deviate one hair's breadth from his resolve to give to this particular plan just because he knew that giving would confirm Uncle George's suspicions, and convince him that Janet had not exaggerated, *but had told absolute truth when she said her husband wanted her money* for the combined object of doing

good to others and to himself. Still, it would be rather a relief to find the scheme upset by some outside chance, with which he himself had nothing to do. It would be more satisfactory to contribute a thousand or two thousand pounds to some other local charity, say, half a year hence.

When he arrived at the parochial rooms, he passed on, as if not intending to enter. Then he turned, as if his eye had just been attracted by the printed announcement of the meeting. It was a probably useless demonstration, but intended to impress the doorkeeper and anybody who might be passing with the impromptu nature of the visit. Without unbuttoning his coat-collar, which concealed the lower part of his features, Dr. Maturin stepped inside the warm, lighted room, and did not glance at the platform till he was in a seat—one of several vacant ones, close to the door and underneath the gallery. As the meeting was to begin at three, it must be half over by now.

The chair did not happen to be occupied by Colonel Wood, Dr. Maturin's Parliamentary rival. The rather refined, sickly looking gentlemen who sat there, listening patiently, but with not much show of interest, to the speeches, was Mr. Bowles-Forwood, the immensely rich retired builder who resided in a stucco mansion in the neighborhood, and who, having "made" his money, wished other people to believe that it had come to him by some providential act of special creation. In his old pushing, contracting, business days he was known everywhere, and respected in some places, as simple Mr. Forwood—"J. B. Forwood and Co." was his trade designation. Success had amply visited him, and a princely house and a double-barrelled name seemed essential to his prosperous maturity. As James Bowles-Forwood, Esquire, his patronage, and especially his contributions, were very welcome to all local charities. Having already helped to crowd many vacant acres near the metropolis with unlovely edifices which he called "genteel residences," he felt aggrieved that anybody else should now attempt to follow his example as regarded the Priory Fields. His conduct in opposing the surrender of the proposed park to unconscientious members of the jerry-builder tribe was considered in Manor End circles as highly magnanimous.

Dr. Maturin had not been mistaken in the supposition that "*that donkey Clarke*," the churchwarden, would be on the platform. He was speaking now. The beginning of his

argument did not transpire, but it was pretty obvious that it had been a long and wearisome one, for people were shuffling with their feet and coughing, and the chairman even roused himself once to take out his watch furtively and glance at the time.

Signs of impatience with his oratory, however, were always lost on Mr. Clarke, who, though an excellent churchwarden, was not a good speaker. By some mysterious process of reasoning he had arrived at the proposition that to build on the Priory Fields was tantamount to gross impiety. The name, he said, plainly showed that at some previous period there had been a "religious foundation" on the spot; and he believed that antiquarian research would reveal the fact that the priory which once existed there was "one of the most wealthy and antiquated"—he meant ancient—"priories that ever was." After repeating this sentiment in other words for about ten minutes, Mr. Clarke observed that he would now leave that branch of the subject, an announcement that was received with quite a chorus of sympathetic plaudits. The "branch" which he next took his seat on seemed a still more insecure resting-place for an unskilful rhetorical climber. Poor Mr. Clarke, who was noted for his ecclesiastical leanings and for always saying the wrong thing, was not quite the man to make the best of the position into which he had blundered.

"It seems, to my judgment," he proceeded, "that we have great reason to regret the absence of the vicar on this occasion, who would have filled the chair so admirably. I don't of course mean," he went on hastily, "to imply that our good friend"—Mr. Bowles-Forwood winced perceptibly at being called Mr. Clarke's good friend—"is not fitted for the position; not by any means. He is a gentleman—a gentleman" ("Hear, hear!") "of great attainments, and great—great respectability, and—and, in fact, the *greatest* respectability." (Cheers and slight tittering.) "He has the privilege of keeping the bag—I mean holding a bag—at our collection in church, as I dare say you are all aware" ("Question," from somebody on the platform), "and has done so now for many years, and the manner in which he hands the bag round and gives it in afterwards is most—most unexceptional." (Cheers.) "I don't know any Churchman who is better qualified to fill a bag—I mean fill a chair—than Mr. Forwood—I beg pardon, I'm sure—I mean Mr. Bowles-For-

wood; but it's all the same." ("No!") "Well, gentlemen, as I was observing, I like myself to see a clergyman presiding on these occasions, and I don't mind saying so, no offence to anybody." (Cries of "Oh, oh!" "Question," and "Order.") "There's a something spiritooal about the proceedings at a public meeting when a priest takes part——" At this point the long suffering chairman leaned over and whispered to the speaker. The latter, perhaps exhausted by his efforts, deviated to another topic, and shortly afterwards brought his speech to a close with an adjuration to his audience to "recollect the noble past history of the site" (which nobody knew anything about), "to remember its sacred associations, and come down heavily." It was something of an anti-climax, but the audience, relieved of the incubus of the churchwarden's style, were not inclined to be minutely critical.

Mr. Clarke sat down, red and flurried, and a little sharp-looking, red-haired man took his place at the front of the platform with surprising alacrity. This was Mr. Sweeting, the flourishing local grocer, who on week days was one of the shrewdest practitioners in chicory and sweepings to be found anywhere in the suburbs of London, and who on Sundays was an Independent.

Mr. Sweeting began by unbuttoning his great coat, so as to give full room for the necessary expansion of his lungs, and before the chairman could find time to announce his name to the audience—which, indeed, was already pretty well known to most of them—he began, in a very loud tone, an onslaught on the last speaker.

"These 'ere Priory Fields"—Mr. Sweeting did not possess, and did not pretend to possess, the slightest claim to culture, which he left to "tiptoppers," as he called his best customers—"is no doubt a very hexcellent hopen space, and long may it remain hopen, for the good of the inhabitants of Manor End and of the 'ole of Lunnon!" (Genuine relief was here felt by the audience that they had left behind them the sandy desert of Mr. Clarke's oratory, and had arrived at a land, like Mr. Sweeting's which promised to flow with milk and honey and vigorous common sense.) "But, Mr. Cheerman, ladies, and gents, I *hentirely* fail to see, and I believe *you* will hentirely fail to see, what on earth the old 'istory of these 'ere fields 'as to do with our determination to buy 'em, *if we can!*" (Applause.) "They may have been once upon

a time, as the fairy books say, howned by a set of 'oly monks, who, if all one reads about 'em in the past is true, were not quite so 'oly as Mr. Clarke 'ere would like us to believe." (Cheers and laughter.) "My motter is this, and I'm not ashamed to hown it, 'Business is business.' What does it siggerfy if the land was a priory, or a workus, or even a jail, a long time ago? What we've to do is to see if we can buy it *now*. I don't see that because it's called Priory Fields there was once a priory 'ere for certain. I know a public in the East End that's called the 'Three Bishops,' yet that doesn't prove that any bishops ever went in at the door, does it, Mr. Clarke?" (Much laughter.)

Mr. Clarke here evinced an intention of answering the question, so the chairman suggested in an undertone to Mr. Sweeting that it would be well to keep away from controversial subjects.

"Right you are, sir," said Mr. Sweeting, cheerfully. "And I may say, Mr. Cheerman, that I'm very glad indeed to see you in the cheer. Our friend 'ere would like a minister—eh? oh, a priest; I beg pardon, I thought it was the same—but *I* am convinced, from hexperience, that there's nothing like a layman to tackle business subjects." (Applause, with some dissent from the Church portion of the audience.) "Our respected friend, Dr. Maturin, for hexample, would have been a good cheerman." (The doctor started; he had been so interested in the proceedings that he had almost forgotten his own reasons for wishing to remain *incognito*.) "We're all very sorry, I'm sure, he's not able to be 'ere to-day." (Applause.) "But I think, ladies and gents, that you'll agree with me that what we wants in a cheerman is a man——"

Mr. Clarke, desirous of having a return blow at the confident and ready-tongued grocer, interrupted to ask the chairman's opinion whether these remarks were in order.

The chairman had been on thorns for some little time, not precisely knowing what Mr. Sweeting would say about himself, and desiring especially to have no allusion made to his own past connection with the building trade. He therefore rose and sadly observed that perhaps compliments to the chair might be reserved for the customary vote at the end of the proceedings.

It took a great deal to discourage Mr. Sweeting, either socially or commercially, and he rose now to the occasion,

and even above and beyond what the occasion strictly required.

"Right you are, sir," he proceeded, using the formula which he had been in the daily habit of employing to important customers for years past. "But what are we're for? It's to *raise the cash*! And what I says is, and I 'ope I'm in order in saying it, whether it's a compliment to the cheer or not—what *I* says is, that we couldn't 'ave no better gentleman to preside on such an occasion as the present than one who knows what business *is*, as *you* do, Mr. Cheerman, or as you 'ave done in the hold days, when you laid out the 'ole of that seven acres over at 'Arlesden in eligible 'igh-class 'ouses; and the way in which them 'ouses is made to show their best side to the street and their worst to them as lives in 'em does the very greatest credit to you, sir, as their *constructor*, I *must* say." Here the audience tittered again, the chairman groaned inwardly, and looked more sickly than ever, and Dr. Maturin in his dark corner hugged himself with delight. He noticed the speaker gazing rather intently in his direction, and he lowered his head. Mr. Sweeting went on volubly, "And I say it is very kind of you, sir, to be with us, feelin', as you nat'rally would do, a sort of feller-feelin' with the building trade as wants to get 'old of these Priory Fields. And now, 'ow are we to get the money? That's the point, and the real point, of our meeting." (General cheering.) "Are we to look to the Board o' Works, or to the City, or to ourselves?" From this beginning, Mr. Sweeting went off into a very lucid disquisition on the practical question of the purchase of the park, and took care not to weary his audience ("For then perhaps they'd send their orders elsewhere," he thought) by spinning out the thread of his verbosity beyond a ten minutes' oration. At the end of which he sat down amid sympathetic applause.

A local antiquary followed. The meeting seemed to be drawing near its close, and as yet Dr. Maturin had not heard how much money had been promised, or whether there was any chance of the park being absorbed before the purchase-money could be found. Perhaps the chairman had mentioned all that in the opening speech, which he had not heard. The doctor decided he would go out at the end of the antiquarian gentleman's remarks. That person was trying to explain to the audience how difficult it was to explain anything about

topography without the aid of a "good chart." He was long-winded, and lost both the thread of his own argument, which did not seem at all cogent, and his hearers' attention. He appeared to think it a matter of urgent public importance that everybody should clearly understand the exact course of a certain dry ditch which once ran right across two of the largest of the Priory Fields, and which he believed to be an early English fosse; but he finally came to the conclusion that it was impossible to trace the course of anything by word of mouth, without a good chart, and sat down rather unexpectedly. Dr. Maturin rose to go, and had, indeed, already emerged from behind his friendly pillar and made one or two steps towards the door, when his progress was arrested.

A voice from the platform shouted out, "Dr. Maturin! Excuse me, Dr. Maturin, please don't go!"

It was the inexpressible and lynx-eyed local grocer. What to him was the fact that the doctor was in mourning? He was a moneyed man. His money and his support would be invaluable. There he was, and being there, and offering a fine opportunity to a tradesman who had the cleverness to notice him, and a burning desire to push himself forward on every occasion, why should he not be made to step on to the platform and say just a few words? Mr. Sweeting would have trembled had he known how near he came at that moment to losing one of his richest customers.

The natural result of Mr. Sweeting's interposition was to turn all eyes in the direction of the door. There stood Dr. Maturin, pale, with a frown on his handsome face, yet perfectly composed. It was the first time that collective Manor End had had an opportunity of gazing on him since the tragedy occurred. There were many noddings and whisperings, amid which the doctor stepped forward and said—

"You will quite understand, sir, that I am here as a listener only."

Dr. Maturin knew well that his appearance and manner always attracted respect, and generally admiration. There was a murmur of sympathy as he said these words. Possibly many of the audience were surprised to see the widower attending a public meeting so soon after his wife's death; but then, Dr. Maturin was a philanthropist. It was duty, no doubt, not pleasure, that had called him from his home.

Unabashed Mr. Sweeting was on his legs again on the platform,

"Very glad, indeed, I am sure we all are, to have Dr. Maturin 'ere in any capacity. A movement like this can 'ardly 'ope to get along without him. We all sympathize deeply most deeply with the—ahem!—sad bereavement which the doctor has suffered." (Sympathetic and subdued cries of "Hear! hear!") "We know better, I 'ope, than to hobtrude on Dr. Maturin's grief, his private sorrers, if I may so express myself; but if it *wouldn't* trouble him too much just to step hup on to the platform, our cheerman could then give him a list of the subscriptions promised hitherto. We don't see," Mr. Sweeting went on unblushingly, "Dr. Maturin's *hown* name on the list yet, and we should be very glad to, though of course the—ahem!—sad bereavement to which I have ventured to allude is the cause of that. Won't you step this way, Dr. Maturin?"

The doctor in answer merely shook his head decidedly, and sat down again.

The chairman at once rose and said in a melancholy tone, but with an emphasis which showed that he did not dislike the chance of putting Mr. Sweeting down for once—

"We can, I think, all of us appreciate Dr. Maturin's dislike of appearing on any public platforms just at present." (Cheers.) "I think, too, it is hardly necessary to dilate on his generosity; that is too well known to all of us." (More cheering, at which Mr. Sweeting looked temporarily almost foolish.) "But we should, of course, be very glad of Dr. Maturin's advice and assistance, if he will give it us privately, whenever he feels able and willing to do so. We should not dream of pressing him at all, but of course this is a matter which does not permit much delay, and a little help now from such an influential source would be invaluable."

Dr. Maturin could not do less than bow his thanks to the Chair for these considerate remarks; nor could he with decency escape till the conclusion of the meeting. After it was over, he walked a little way towards his house with Mr. Bowles-Forwood, who, he knew, could enlighten him on the exact position of the park scheme. He was glad, secretly glad, to hear that the land was wanted by a great building firm, and that there were even doubts if the present owners were not already in correspondence with these people.

"Of course," said the doctor, sadly and seriously, as he *parted from the chairman* near his own garden gate, "I

cannot be expected to aid in any way yet. I shall be glad to do what I can, as you know, but not yet. I have a horror of these"—"brick-and-mortar fiends," he was going to say, but remembered that Mr. Forwood might consider this a reference to his own past calling, and hastened to substitute—"these jerry builders, who put up rotten dwellings. The poor are packed in slums in a way that makes my heart bleed." The doctor took a sixpence from his pocket, and gave it to a beggar.

"Ah ! you've a feeling heart, sir," said the ex-builder. "I knew the park plan would meet with *your* approval. Good night. My deepest sympathies—my deepest sympathies."

"Thanks ! Good night."

Dr. Maturin went indoors. He had not found everything go that evening just as he would have liked it to go. But he had, at all events, learned two things. One was that Manor End society was friendly towards him as ever ; the other was that the park plan might collapse at any moment, and that his subscription, if given, ought to be given soon.

CHAPTER XI.

UNCLE GEORGE ON THE TRAIL.

WITH the very best will in the world, Uncle George was nevertheless not able to accomplish impossibilities. There was always the necessity of attending to business at Red Lion Court ; if it had not been attended to, clients of every kind would have wanted to "know the reason why" in imperious notes. Mr. George Betteridge's one desire at this time was to convert himself altogether into an amateur and utterly inexperienced detective ; but circumstances were too powerful for him. Janet's death haunted him wherever he went. Do what he might, argue with himself as he might about the folly of unjust suspicions, the proved fatuity of trusting to mere appearances, he could not get out of his head the idea that there had been foul play. He told himself that he would have been suspicious in any case, even if she had not admitted *him behind the scenes* just before she died, and

disclosed to him her money quarrel with her husband; but that information certainly had added tenfold force to his powers of distrusting Maturin.

It was odious to have to settle deeds and prepare mortgages and see litigants, and do the other hundred odds and ends of soliciting work, while all the time this Black Care sat behind the horseman; yet go through with it Mr. George Betteridge had to, and did.

On the first day that he was at all free, after his interview with Mrs. Longstaff, he sallied forth to attack Dr. Thornton Treadway. He did not expect much from talking to that extremely scientific person, but, at any rate, it was his duty to try any means of clearing up the whole mystery. He determined to tackle Dr. Treadway, just as he would have tackled a very obstinate police magistrate, simply because it was right to do so. It was on a Saturday afternoon that he visited the eminent specialist's house, his first opportunity, and Dr. Treadway was not at home; had gone down to Eastbourne from Saturday to Monday.

The following Tuesday the able solicitor tried again. This time he was more successful. Mr. George Betteridge sent in his card, enclosed in an envelope, on which he had written, "Will Dr. Thornton Treadway kindly see Mr. Betteridge for a few minutes, relative to the inquest on Mrs. Maturin and his evidence?"

Dr. Treadway was at once accessible. Mr. Betteridge found the great scientific authority seated at a table covered with books, and papers, and medical knick-knacks of various kinds. On a side-table at his elbow was a row of suspicious-looking bottles, some of which had "poison" in very large red letters printed on them.

"Have you ever in your experience known another instance of death from such a cause as this?" was the first question he asked, after the polite preliminaries were over.

Dr. Treadway swung his chair round so as to face his questioner, brought his spectacles to bear fully on him, and answered—

"I have never known a case in which all the details were similar."

"Is suffocation—accidental suffocation—a common form of death in your experience?"

"Pardon me. This was not death from accidental suffocation."

The unlikely thought flashed across Uncle George's mind, "Is he going to tell me that his suspicions are the same as mine?" It increased the eagerness with which he leaned forward to say—

"Not accidental suffocation?"

"No, certainly not," replied Dr. Treadway, with perfect composure. "It was not suffocation at all; it was narcotization, terminating in death."

The solicitor threw himself back, disappointed. "And you consider it was accidental?"

"Assuredly." Dr. Treadway took off his spectacles, carefully rubbed them, put them on again, and stared hard. The question evidently surprised him.

The solicitor continued, "Well, then, Dr. Treadway, let me ask you this. Are cases of accidental poisoning a common medical experience—poisoning by gas?"

"I very rarely have to investigate any case of poisoning which is *not* accidental," Dr. Thornton Treadway answered, after a pause. "Toxicology, if I do not flatter myself, is now so precise a science that toxic agents are rarely employed deliberately to put an end to life. In this case, sir," he went on, suddenly raising his voice, "I presume you do not mean to hint anything against my friend Dr. Maturin, one of the kindest-hearted men in the world, an ornament of the profession? Your questions have rather an ugly sound."

"No," the solicitor replied insincerely; "not in the least. I, however, as Mrs. Maturin's uncle, take a natural interest in her melancholy and untimely decease, and I should be glad if you could tell me anything whatever, of any kind, which might possibly throw a light on it."

"I wish I could. There you say again, 'Throw a light on it.' Why, there was enough light thrown by *me* at the inquest to enable the jury to come to a decision—a perfectly rational and proper decision, was it not?"

The solicitor parried the direct question.

"Well, I will say 'further light,' Dr. Treadway. Remember, whatever you tell me will be in the strictest confidence."

"There is nothing for me to tell. I know no more than you do."

"I suppose even the best experimenters are sometimes careless?"

"Not at all." Here Dr. Treadway's *esprit de corps* was

touched. "A man liable to be careless ought never to experiment. I am never careless. I have known Maturin for years. He is a most prudent, careful man, I should say."

"Ah!" said the solicitor, who had got an admission at last. "Then you were doubtless very surprised when you heard that he had allowed this gas to escape by accident."

"What are you aiming at, sir?" asked the specialist. "You seem to wish to entrap me."

"Entrap *you*! I should not dream of such a thing—on your own subjects, too, about which I know nothing."

"No; well, I suppose you would not," said Dr. Treadway, somewhat reassured. "My time, however, is valuable. Have you anything more to ask?" He rose from his seat, evidently wearied.

The able solicitor did not like wasting arguments on stone walls. He replied—

"Nothing. I am much obliged to you. Good morning."

As he returned to his office, Mr. George Betteridge said to himself, "That man is a cross between Dr. Johnson and Professor Cruxley. How absolute the knave it! So Dr. Maturin is one of the most cautious, careful men he ever knew? I thought as much. And you are a friend of his, Dr. Treadway. Nothing like these scientific fellows for holding together and backing each other up."

Two afternoons later, Mr. George Betteridge was off again on his hopeless errand, as he was coming to think it, of trying to discover something more about poor Janet's death. He was not in high spirits. His interview with Dr. Thornton Treadway had made him see the obstacles in his path. This time, however, he was not to be disappointed. For it was over to Finchley that he directed his steps, to see Mrs. Vane, whose address he had discovered in a directory. Though he knew the colonel, he had never spoken to his wife.

Mrs. Vane had only just come down into the drawing-room. She was "not at home" to visitors. When, however, Mr. George Betteridge sent up his card and his business, he was admitted at once.

If the truth must be told, Uncle George did not care about *tete-a-tete* interviews with women, as a rule. He had never married himself, and thought most women "simpering idiots," though he was much too polite to breathe this *heresy* to anybody. He hated doing business with them.

When he entered the Vane's drawing-room, it was with the idea that he would most probably encounter one of the simpering genus. Mrs. Vane could not be worth much, or she would have been at the inquest, and generally made more fuss about Janet. Still, the housekeeper said she was a great friend of Janet's, and, if she had been a Medusa or a Circe, George Betteridge felt he was bound to see what she knew or did not know of the circumstances antecedent to the catastrophe at Freemantle House.

But the first few words he had with Mrs. Vane, and indeed the first view of that excellent matronly woman, showed him *she* was decidedly not a simpering idiot. She might be some other kind of idiot, but she did not simmer.

"You will excuse my calling on you, madam," Mr. Betteridge began, after depositing his gloves on a chair at his side, "but the fact is that I am the late Mrs. Maturin's uncle, and I heard from Mrs. Longstaff that you were a great friend of hers—of Mrs. Maturin's, I mean."

"Mrs. Longstaff! Let me see, that was poor Janet's housekeeper, I think?"

"Yes, it was. A very sensible person, I should fancy."

"I don't know her myself," said Mrs. Vane; "but I know Janet always spoke highly of her. You are quite right in supposing that I was a great friend of your dear niece; indeed, I loved her as if she were my sister, poor child." At the thought of her loss Mrs. Vane, who was still weak, could not help a sob or two; and Uncle George took out his handkerchief and blew his nose loudly in sympathy. Mrs. Vane was decidedly refreshing. "I am very glad indeed that you have called, Mr. Betteridge," Mrs. Vane went on, having recovered her composure quite as soon as did her visitor; "I have been wanting to see somebody who would tell me about this dreadful affair. Of course, I know all that was in the newspapers, and the account of the inquest, and all that; but I have not set eyes on anybody belonging to the household or the family; and, indeed, my recent confinement has prevented me thinking much of the matter till this last week. *Think*, of course, I have done, but not in a practical way, only grieving. A few days ago I thought of that Mrs. Longstaff, the housekeeper, and wrote to her; but my letter was returned, with a message scrawled on the outside, apparently by some servant, saying that Mrs. Longstaff had gone

This was satisfactory to Uncle George, both because it fully explained why this particular friend of Janet's had been absent from the inquest, and also because it showed that Mrs. Vane was ready and anxious to join in the general detective hunt that he wished to organize relative to the death.

So Uncle George unburdened his mind of all that he knew, and, led on by Mrs. Vane's evident sympathy, of a good deal of what he surmised as well. He told of the conversation which Janet had with him.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Vane, who was greatly surprised and deeply interested, "then it was as I suspected. She was *not* happy at home."

"Pray, madam, had you any real reason to form that suspicion?"

"Not till the last time I saw her, about a week before her death. Even then there was nothing definite. But a woman does not sigh, and look strange, and have her eyes full of tears, and then a moment after be lively and laughing, for nothing. Now that you have told me about the dispute with her husband, it is all explained. Oh, how I wish I had had an inkling of it before!"

"Had I had the pleasure of your acquaintance, Mrs. Vane, before to-day, I should certainly have come and consulted you directly after my conversation with Mrs. Maturin. I would have asked you to try and get some more facts out of my niece about her husband's objects; women are more communicative to women than they are even to their own uncles."

"It would have been of no use; Janet would not have told me much. She was very plucky, and she worshipped that husband of hers. At least, if she did not, she wanted everybody to think that she did. I asked her distinctly whether she was unhappy at home, I remember."

"You did? And what did she say?"

"Oh, that nobody could possibly be happier—a nice house, a good husband—something to that effect; I forget the words. What first made me think she might have trouble at home was that she used some strange words to me. She said, 'I feel as if you were my only friend;' and then directly she stopped, as if she feared she had gone too far."

"*All this is very interesting—very important, indeed. I*

feel I can trust you, madam ; and that is why I say things to you which I should not to most people. A lawyer, you know, walks in perpetual dread of the law of slander. But I will say this much. It seems to me that this death grows more suspicious the more I examine it. First there was Mrs. Longstaff's evidence ; now there is yours." Mr. Betteridge took out his pocket-book and wrote for a minute or two. He was putting down what Mrs. Vane had told him while it was fresh in his mind.

"There is something more I have to tell you," Mrs. Vane said, when she saw he had finished.

"Indeed ! Then I will make a note of it as you tell it me ;" and the pocket-book was ready for action again.

"Yes. It is something you may perhaps laugh at ; it was something Janet said. I could not understand it then, and I don't now. But it struck me as peculiar and suspicious directly I heard of her death."

"Pray go on."

"Well, it was this. We were talking of other subjects, when suddenly she broke in with a question about a Mr. Peabody committing a murder. She wanted to know if I had read in the paper anything about such a crime. I said I had not heard of it. 'Then,' she asked, 'who is the great Mr. Peabody ?' She had evidently never heard of the man who gave all that money to the London poor a short time ago. So I told her who he was, and I said he was a great philanthropist. 'Are you quite sure,' she asked, in a most anxious way, 'that he never did murder anybody ?' She looked at me with such a troubled expression, and said, 'Do think !' I thought it extremely odd at the time. But she went off—you know her way—to something else a moment after, and I never discovered what she meant. She only said, 'I must have made a stupid mistake.' That was the last time I ever saw her."

Mr. George Betteridge finished writing, and thought deeply for a few minutes.

"I can't fathom that," he said at length. "Let us suppose Maturin intended, deliberately intended, to murder his wife. It is not in the least likely he would give any hint to her, much less talk about murders. But he is a philanthropist, in a small way, and Peabody was a philanthropist. Perhaps it was some other Peabody, who did really commit a murder, eh ?"

"She distinctly said the 'great' Mr. Peabody."

"Ah! that settles it. It's certainly very dark and suspicious. Here is the wife of a philanthropist, mysteriously killed and found dead in her husband's laboratory, talking a week before her death of murders by philanthropists! But how on earth could she have got the idea into her head?"

"I have thought and puzzled about it so often," Mrs. Vane said. "All I can think of is this. Could Dr. Maturin have said something about it in his sleep, and she overhear him?"

The solicitor pondered for a moment.

"That is an excellent suggestion; it really is. Such a thing is possible. If so, it distinctly proves that it *was* a murder, and a most cunning and deliberate one. I must think over all that you have told me, and see what can be done. And," said Mr. Betteridge, in rising to take his leave, "allow me to say, Mrs. Vane, that you are the first person I should come to for help; you have told me most important facts, and I see I can trust you implicitly not to reveal them unnecessarily."

"You can rely on that." Then a doubt seemed to pass across Mrs. Vane's mind. "I don't want to have to give evidence, or be drawn prominently forward, if it can be helped," she went on. "Of course, if necessary, I would do anything to clear up the mystery; I feel I owe it to dear Janet's memory. But my husband, Colonel Vane, is a friend of Dr. Maturin's, and I think they have some—some money affairs together; and so I feel that *he* would not like me to run counter to Dr. Maturin's interests, unless, as I said, it was necessary."

"I see," said the solicitor, quietly.

This last fact troubled him all the way home. Colonel Vane had money dealings of some kind with Dr. Maturin. What could they be? Were the Vanes in Maturin's power in any way? That Mrs. Vane was an admirable woman. She had told him enough to make his duty plain. There was now a case, he felt, of strong suspicion, moral suspicion, against Dr. Maturin. It was his duty to submit it to his brother's family; but how to reach them he knew not. He could not brook another repulse at the hands of his brother. It was a choice between telling his sister-in-law or telling Bob Betteridge, his nephew. The latter was a loose fish, he *knew*, but he had sense, and he was fond of his dead foster-

sister. The solicitor's dislike to transacting business with women turned the scale in favor of getting hold of Bob, and trying to influence him to work on his parents. So, on an excuse of wanting to talk about a horse he was thinking of purchasing, Mr. George Betteridge invited his promising nephew to come over to his house in Bloomsbury and have lunch.

The meeting between Bob and his uncle began well and pleasantly. Bob drove over in a mail phaeton from Red Hill, and the appearance of this young man with his dashing equipage in Uncle George's quiet street created some public excitement. The groom was told to put the horse and trap up at a stable. Meanwhile Bob, arrayed in a dark cutaway coat and the tightest of trousers, appeared in his uncle's drawing-room. He had mourning bands, to be sure, on each arm; but Mr. Betteridge was shocked to see that he was not altogether in black.

"Well, how about that horse?" was Bob's greeting.

"What horse?" asked Uncle George, after shaking hands.

"Why, the one you wanted me to inspect for you."

"Oh, ah!" said his uncle, recollecting the excuse; "yes, we can do that after lunch."

"Is it a horse or a mare, eh?"

"Well, it's not exactly——" Uncle George pulled himself up when on the point of saying that it was not exactly either. He knew very little about horses, and cared less. "That is to say—oh! it's a horse, I believe."

Bob stared. He thought his uncle must be going off his head with too much work.

"A roan or a chestnut?" he went on.

"Eh?"

"What color is it?"

"Oh, well, it's a sort of—a sort of chestnut, you know."

"You evidently do want advice badly," said irreverent Bob. "Can't you tell us any more about the animal?"

The lunch-bell rang. It was a timely diversion. Uncle George managed to keep the conversation off the inconvenient quadruped during the meal. At the close, he made Bob draw his chair up to the fire, filled his glass, and began the real serious business he had contemplated in inviting his nephew.

"I see you are not in mourning, Bob.

"Oh yes, I am ; look there !" He pointed to his arm.

"That's not *my* idea of proper mourning for a cousin who was as good as a sister."

"It's a month ago," pleaded Bob.

"You were fond of her, weren't you ?" Mr. George Betteridge inquired.

"Why, uncle ! Yes, of course, I was—poor little girl !"

"I thought so. Well, now, I should like your opinion. I believe you have a great deal of sense, Bob, if you like to use it."

"You don't mean it !" interrupted Bob ironically.

"I do," said his uncle, stoutly. "I should like your opinion, your sober opinion, on the whole affair of Janet's death."

Bob looked at his uncle in wonder. "Why, I know no more about it than anybody else."

"Will you listen while I tell you a few things—a few facts which will probably be new to you ?"

"Oh, certainly, certainly," said Bob, settling himself down in his armchair, and crossing his legs comfortably.

"I don't want you to tell what I say to you now to anybody, except your father and mother. Remember that. I want, first of all, to inform you that many people have doubts as to whether the coronor's jury came to a right conclusion." The solicitor paused, to see what effect the remark would have.

It did not seem to have much. Bob only said, "Oh, have they ?" and then added, "Let's see. The jury said it was accidental—caused by some gas. Well, what's wrong in that ?"

Mr. George Betteridge had doubts as to Bob's brain being quite water-tight with regard to holding secrets, so proceeded cautiously.

"I don't say what the doubts are ; I merely say there *are* doubts. Now, I will put before you two or three curious circumstances. As they affect the very serious question of how your dear sister came by her death, I beg you to give me the whole of your attention. I shan't keep it on the stretch very long."

Uncle George wished his words repeated at Southwold Court. He knew that to effect this end he must grave them deeply on Bob's volatile mind. He began with his strongest fact first—the fact that Janet had a quarrel with her husband *because the latter wanted money which she declined to give.*

This was, of course, entirely new to Bob, who seemed a good deal interested.

"Aren't husbands and wives always quarrelling about money?" he asked at the end.

"Not like that. I tell it you to show what sort of a man Dr. Maturin is. That's the first point. If you doubt that she *was* made unhappy by her husband, I will tell you what Mrs. Longstaff, her housekeeper, told me." Then the solicitor repeated what he had heard when Mrs. Longstaff called, and went on to dwell on that strange fact—related by her at the inquest, and much added to in her private conversation with him—as to Dr. Maturin's conduct in his own hall on the afternoon of the tragedy. Uncle George told the tale as dramatically as he could; but was disappointed at the result when Bob said—

"Don't see much in that. What are you driving at, uncle? Do you mean that Hartas *wanted* Janet to die, or that he knew about it, or what?"

"My dear boy, I am not stating conclusions. I want you to weigh the facts I mention in your own mind."

And he proceeded to his final piece of evidence—Mrs. Vane's testimony as to Janet's conversation on the last occasion that she saw her alive. Here, too, the able solicitor was baffled.

"There's nothing in that," Bob said at the conclusion, with the easy confidence of inexperience. "How lawyers do twist things! That about Peabody might mean anything; she might have picked up some old newspaper, or it may have been another Peabody."

"Quite so," said the solicitor, dryly. "But why 'the great Mr. Peabody,' eh, Bob?"

"Oh, a mistake! Probably it was the great Mr. Palmer, you know. He *did* commit a murder."

Irritated as he was, Uncle George could not help thinking in his own mind that Bob was no fool, after all. He had not much time to indulge in thought of any kind, however, for Bob, finding the evidence at an end, got up from his seat, and said warmly—

"Well, I consider you're treating my brother-in-law shamefully. He's a thundering good fellow, is Maturin. And I've always called him my brother-in-law. You're hinting that he's a murderer, as far as I can see."

"Excuse me, I hint nothing of the kind."

"The whole thing's absurd. Why, everybody likes and— and respects him. I know *I* like him—always did. No fellow gives better dinners. Have you ever tasted his Madeira? No? Then you've a treat in store. He's a splendid rider. I've shot with him over the moors, too, and I can tell you he's a crack shot; he is indeed."

"I've no doubt he's particular deadly," said the solicitor.

"You lawyers——" Bob was beginning; but here the patience of his uncle unexpectedly gave way. He was already irritated at failing to make the impression on his nephew which he had hoped to make. But to be lectured and bullied by him in addition was more than he could bear, excellent as his temper usually was. He astonished Bob by leaping from his seat, and confronting him at the other end of the mantelpiece, his face flaming red.

"We lawyers! Who are you, sir, to asperse your uncle's profession—an honorable profession? We lawyers! The impudence of these young university know-nothings! What is *your* profession, sir, that you can afford to look down on me and my calling in life?"

"If you're going to ballyrag me, I'll go," Bob said, moving slowly to the door.

"Wait a minute!" Mr. George Betteridge had time to reflect that, as his plan in summoning his nephew had miscarried, it would not be bad policy to send him away with something else to think of besides Dr. Maturin and his doings. He was angry, too, and altogether thought this was a good opportunity to give Bob a diminutive portion of his mind as to his idleness and general unsatisfactoriness. As his father would not act as mentor, his uncle should take the office. "I should like to know, before you go, what your object in life *is*, Bob?"

"At present it's to enjoy myself as much as I can," said the incorrigible nephew, coolly.

"I thought so. A noble ambition! What are you fit for? Is there anything in the world that you can do?"

"Oh, yes; I'll back myself to ride bare-back on an average steeplechase course against any gentleman rider in England."

"Ride in a steeplechase! Barebacked!" The idea of such a descent for a member of the Betteridge family quite took Uncle George's breath away.

"Properly handicapped, you know," Bob proceeded, with

exasperating coolness ; " that's a condition. I couldn't do it unless properly handicapped ; 'twouldn't be fair."

Uncle George fairly boiled over with impotent wrath and disgust.

" You're a disgrace to the family," he shouted, " and I tell you what it is. The only career that would suit you would be to go to America and become a cow-boy on the prairies."

Bob was angry too, now, but he kept his temper beautifully as he asked—

" A cow-boy, eh ? What's that ? Any relation to a Red Indian ? At all events, I don't take away a fellow's character for nothing ; and I'm going to dine with Maturin to-night."

" Get out of the house, sir ; I want no more of your impudence !" said Mr. George Betteridge.

" Very well," said Bob, indignantly. " It's the first time you've turned me out of your house, and it's the last. It won't be my fault if you see my face again." He went out, and, after a moment or two in the hall, his uncle heard him slam the front door behind him.

" Is he a fool or a rascal ?" thought Mr. George Betteridge. " He's an impudent young cub, anyhow. I don't think he's a rascal, and I'm sure he's not altogether a fool. But to go and dine with Maturin, after what I've just told him ! The unutterable blockhead !"

CHAPTER XII.

A LITTLE DINNER AND ITS RESULT.

OF course Dr. Maturin did not entertain visitors yet, in the proper sense of the word. But there was no harm in having his brother-in-law in to a quiet dinner ; and in order to make things go pleasantly for Bob, and possibly for other reasons as well, he had invited Colonel Vane to come too. It was a small bachelor party. The doctor could not be too lively. But he hoped that Vane would not feel subdued by associations connected with the unfortunate incident of his wife's death, and that he would talk horses and other con-

genial subjects to Bob, who, for his part, was not at all likely to need much drawing out.

As it happened, however, Bob was out of spirits. The occurrence was so rare with him that he was inclined to attribute exaggerated importance to it. It was all owing to Uncle George's attack on him, and he resented that attack the more because it had thrown him into the dumps. He felt that he had been shamefully used; and perhaps he also felt that, to the casual and uninstructed onlooker, who did not know what an admirable series of excuses he held in reserve, complaints of his idleness, his horsiness, his having no object in life and not wanting to have any, might seem to contain just a slight admixture of truth. It is, however, unpleasant even for criminals to be rated as if they had committed burglary when they are guilty of nothing worse than petty larceny.

His depression was marked enough to attract Dr. Maturin's attention even before the soup had been taken away. He signalled to Colonel Vane to look at Bob. The colonel looked, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Hard hit at Liverpool, eh, Bob?" he asked.

"Didn't make a bet—at least, nothing to speak of," Bob replied.

"Lost at cards?"

"Only to you, last time I played."

Dr. Maturin smiled, and said in a melancholy tone, "He rather has you there, I think, Vane."

"Well, he can afford to drop a little," said the colonel. "What *is* the matter, Bob? You're out of sorts, and there's no reason for it. Now, if it was *me*, you'd have some excuse. I've sent in another application to the War Office, and this time I've got a friend at court, who's to back me up. But it's a month since I sent in, and I've heard nothing. The War Office——"

"Is an institution for providing colonels for vacant posts, Vane, not for providing vacant posts for colonels," Dr. Maturin interrupted.

Bob laughed. It was the first time that evening.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "my old uncle—George Betteridge—has been pitching into me. Got me over to his house to give him advice about a horse, so he said, and then, when he's got me there, blew me up sky-high. A sneaking dodge!"

"What did he blow you up for?" asked Colonel Vane, whom the misfortunes of others always interested and pleased.

Dr. Maturin spared Bob the trouble of reopening his wounds by saying—

"I know he thinks you might have done better at college. But I told him some time ago that you had only been there a year, and that it was unfair to judge too soon."

"Just so," said Bob, warmly sympathizing with so reasonable a view of things. "I thought you'd see it in that light, Hartas. I shall scrape through and get my degree all right. He's a grumpy, crusty old bachelor, and confoundedly ignorant, too. I don't believe he knows the names of the starters for the Leger!" Colonel Vane laughed. "I don't indeed," said Bob, scandalized at the hypothetical ignorance involved.

"Well, I don't love Dr. Fell very much," said Dr. Maturin.

"Dr. Fell? Who's he?" queried Bob.

"Oh! your uncle George, I mean."

"No; he was not at all polite to *you*, Hartas, I can tell you."

Any other man would have said at once, "Why, what did he say against me?" Dr. Maturin's way was somewhat different.

"He may mean well," he said slowly, and as if talking to himself; "yes, he *may* mean well. But he is crotchety. He seemed always to nurse the delusion that he had some right of property in my dear wife, and never could forgive me for marrying her."

"He has not forgiven you now," Bob put in.

"No? Well, I did not expect it. He is half crazed on that subject. I should not wonder, now"—here he took up a delicately cut decanter of Venetian glass, and poised it on the tips of his fingers—"if he really thought that her death, poor darling, was somehow or other *my* fault!" Dr. Maturin almost closed one eye as if to catch the sparkle of the claret in the glass more clearly; then in the most natural way in the world he let his eyes fall on Bob's face, almost in a line with his fingers as he held them up. Bob took this as a sign he might speak; that the doctor's quasi-soliloquy was over.

"That's exactly what he does seem to think," he said emphatically. "And I should not have liked to mention it, Hartas, if you had not happened to pitch on the very thing."

"I don't understand," said Colonel Vane, who was not given to *finesse*. "Do you mean to say he suspects Maturin, my good friend Maturin, of—of—"

"He only hinted," said Bob. "But it looks as if he had been hunting up evidence against you; because he told it all to me, and asked me to repeat it to the governor." Bob considered himself absolved from any implied pledge of secrecy by his indignation at his uncle's aspersions on Hartas; also, in a lesser degree, by his abominable conduct to himself.

"Queer!" was Colonel Vane's comment.

"The old gentleman's head must be wrong; he must be crazed," said the host. When the servant had left the room for the last time, Dr. Maturin shifted the conversation back again to crazy George Betteridge, and asked Bob with seeming carelessness what he did say.

Now, Bob was no good hand at reproducing a narrative. He felt, too, that it was a family affair, and that he would rather Colonel Vane were not present, especially as he would have to bring his wife into the tale.

Still, with Hartas Maturin's compelling gaze on him he felt bound to proceed. He had complete confidence in Maturin. If *he* thought Colonel Vane ought to hear the story, why, he *should* hear it.

This was how it came about that within six hours of Uncle George revealing to his nephew the results of his patient ferreting into the Maturin mystery, the man he suspected knew as much about the matter as himself. Bob blundered through the narrative, contradicted himself here and there, and corrected himself, but told everything. All that his host did while the damning evidence of his own guilt was being laid before him was gently to say, "Go on, go on!" when Bob seemed disposed to stop. But he had given up toying with the decanter; what Bob said was too interesting to lose by inattention. So his wife *had* overheard him, and had told Mrs. Vane what she overheard!

It was characteristic strategy on the doctor's part that at the end he merely sighed deeply, and then looked to Colonel Vane as if he expected him to say something. The colonel took the hint.

"Shameful! abominable! If I were Maturin, I'd have him up for slander precious sharp."

"I should hardly have thought your wife would have been a party to such a thing, Vane."

"My wife's a fool!"

"No, she is not that," Dr. Maturin corrected; "but, like most women, she takes prejudiced views in the case of those of whom she is fond." (Bob nodded his assent to this proposition.) "I shall look to you, Vane, to correct your wife's views on this subject."

Colonel Vane somehow did not like the tone in which this remark was made. He fidgeted in his seat, and helped himself to a biscuit which he had no intention of eating.

"Uncle George is cracked—decidedly cracked," said Dr. Maturin, pensively. "Otherwise, of course, I should have to adopt Vane's suggestion, and punish him. But I hope my character is well enough established to make all calumnies appear in their true light. I think, Bob, you said your uncle was rude to *you* also on this interesting occasion?"

"Rude! He ordered me out of the house."

"You don't say so?" said the doctor, really astonished.

Bob had now to relate the tale of his own wrongs at the hands, or lips, of his respected uncle. Dr. Maturin listened attentively, and for some time after, while Colonel Vane was expressing loud-voiced sympathy with Bob, he was plunged in thought.

And the thought uppermost in his mind now was—"Uncle George is dangerous. Uncle George must have his teeth drawn, at all events during the time that the promised subscription is being given and talked about." As for dropping the project, he was not the man to drop anything lightly. He had done the deed in order to have a free hand in money matters; he did not intend to be shackled by a wife's uncle any more than by a wife. Still, just at the time when the gift was announced it *would* be advisable to get Uncle George out of the way; or to reduce him to silence in some fashion or other. Could not he himself provide the too inquisitive solicitor with some other occupation for the next few weeks?

Thinking over this project as the other two talked, he fancied Bob might be utilized. It was a happy accident that he had quarrelled with his uncle. Bob was at a loose end. He had a liking for roving. His uncle had told him he ought to go to America and be a cow-boy, and had turned him out of his house. Dr. Maturin had a clear perception that Uncle George would repent of what he had done; if he could induce Bob actually to take his uncle's advice, and go to America, not telling his friends anything about it, his

uncle would very likely think he had committed suicide, or levanted for good, and would be so horror-stricken with remorse that his power of injuring *him*—Dr. Maturin—would be reduced to zero. They would hear about it, too, at Southwold Court—he would take good care of that. There would be an instant rupture between the brothers; John would be on his side, and Uncle George would be in such terrible disgrace there, as the cause of Bob's flight, that anything he might say against the donor of a certain charitable subscription would be discredited. It would come from a man whom his own brother had cut—one who had driven his nephew from his doors!

When he plotted deliberately, Dr. Maturin, as we have reason to know, could be slow. But he could also come to a decision with lightning-like rapidity, and execute that decision with the utmost promptness. He did both on this occasion.

"Bob, help yourself to a glass of wine. Vane, will you fetch us the cigars from the smoking-room?"

Colonel Vane rose to obey; Bob looked at his mechanical obedience with some surprise. It did not, however, astonish him greatly that Maturin should have extraordinary influence over anybody he came in contact with, and he filled his glass. It was by no means the first he had taken that evening. Wine-drinking was a method of taking the taste of Uncle George away from his mental palate.

In a minute, Dr. Maturin rose and said—

"You stay here, Bob. Vane must be fumbling about among the books; I'll go and help him."

Bob was left alone for quite ten minutes. When the colonel and his host returned, the conversation somehow got on to the pleasures of travel.

"You've been in the States, Vane; what did you think of them?" Dr. Maturin asked innocently.

"Think of them? It's just the finest country in the world for some things. For hunting, fishing, shooting, there's no country like it. Ah! such glorious times I have had there—when I was younger, you know—it makes my mouth water to think of them!"

"You don't say so?" said Bob, much interested. He had been employing the interval of the absence of the colonel and his host by going to the cupboard, as he felt privileged to do *in his* (so-called) brother-in-law's house, and extracting

thence the materials for a strong brew of whiskey toddy, of which he had already copiously partaken. Dr. Maturin was not ill-pleased at seeing his condition. But he did not wish him to become intoxicated—*then* he would not have the sense to understand anything. The doctor got possession of the toddy under pretence of seeing if it were hot enough.

"Yes. It's not like England," pursued the colonel—"not a bit. Within a few hours of New York you can get into pathless forests, in the Adirondacks, where the lakes are simply swarming with salmon and bull-trout; and you've got panthers, bears, wolves, lynxes, wild cats, and wolverines for your gun, as well as deer—any amount of deer."

"By Jove!" Bob could only exclaim.

"Birds! then there are birds—eagles, hawks, ducks, crane, partridges, and no end of other kinds."

Bob was leaning forward, and asked anxiously—

"I say, is it all preserved?"

"Preserved? Of course not."

"Have you shot there yourself?"

"That I have. Splendid mountainous scenery, too, if you care for that. Higher hills than you get anywhere in Scotland. The lakes are four thousand feet up! Lake Perkins is more than twenty miles long."

Dr. Maturin softly repeated "Lake Perkins" to himself. "What a name!" he said, and shuddered.

"But, by Jove, I say!" Bob said, in much excitement; "why—why the dickens haven't I been told of this before?"

"Oh, that's nothing to the hunting and sport you'd have if you went further west, with buffaloes and grislies. I've only been telling you what you could get within an hour or so of New York. And New York's only ten to fourteen days from London." Then the colonel launched out into a narrative of hunting adventures which he had himself participated in, according to his own account, among the Crees—"friendly redskins," he explained. Dr. Maturin at the end said—

"Quite exciting, Vane! Admirably told!"

"Why shouldn't I go there?" Bob asked, in a loud voice, as if he expected opposition. "I don't see why I shouldn't go there; eh, Hartas?"

"Well, no, nor do I," said the doctor, in a melancholy, indifferent tone. "It might cure you of the blues."

"Bob," said Colonel Vane, "I tell you what—go at once! I'd give any money to be free like you, and able to cut across to New York. Go at once! No time like the present. If you delay, something may put it off."

"I think I will," said pliant Bob. "Capital idea!"

"You could have a couple of months' such shooting and fishing as you've never had in your life before."

"And be back for the Lent Term at Oxford," said Bob. "By Jove, Vane, I will!"

"Let's see, Bob; are you wise?" said Dr. Maturin, now that he saw the bird in the trap. "Are you certain you *do* care for shooting so much?" It was the doctor's cue to give Bob the idea that he was somewhat adverse to the proposal.

"Of course," Bob replied rather scornfully. "And there's another thing. You know Pearl of the Sierras, eh?"

"I can't say I do," said the doctor.

"Why, it's the famous champion trotter, you know—champion pony of the world. There's a match over in New York between her and the English one; I forget the name. It's coming off soon, too, and I could see *that* when I'm over there."

"If you're really bent on it," said Dr. Maturin, resignedly, "I see no particular objection. And if I were you, I should start soon, as Vane suggests."

"I will—I will," Bob said excitedly. The wine and toddy, and his uncle's rudeness and Maturin's influence, were enough to clinch his resolution to be off to New York at once.

"And if *that's* any inducement to you, Bob," said his brother-in-law, "it'll pay Uncle George out, your going. You could send him a note, saying you're disgusted with his insult to you, and that, as he's chosen to turn you out of his house, he must not be surprised at the consequences. Say that, as he recommended you to be a cow-boy, you *are* going to be a cow-boy in the Far West. And tell *him* to acquaint your parents with your departure."

"Ah! splendid!" laughed Bob, relishing the doctor's wit immensely. "When shall I go? I'd better drop a line home first, eh?"

"I wouldn't if I were you," said the colonel. "Maturin *will tell 'em* about you. There's a North Germain Lloyd's due

to call at Southampton to-morrow about 10 a. m. Go down to Southampton to-night; put up there; start to-morrow. There's your programme. You can get your hunting kit in New York. And I tell you what—if you do that, *I'll come with you!*"

"What! all the way to New York?"

"No; down to Southampton to-night."

"All right," said Bob, hilariously; "I'm game. When's there a train?"

In this way the doctor's new plot was hatched and carried out all within a few hours. And Bob and Colonel Vane started about ten at night for Waterloo Station in a cab from Freemantle House, with only one portmanteau between them.

"Keep him up to writing that letter to his uncle," said Dr. Maturin, just before Colonel Vane stepped into the cab. "It's most important."

The travellers arrived safely at Southampton at midnight, and put up at an hotel. Colonel Vane gave positive orders that they were to be called at seven, sharp. He had beguiled the journey down with more anecdotes of the Far West, partly drawn from his own experience, and, where that failed, from reading and imagination. For all that, the result of the night air and the travelling and the unusual position was to make Bob, on walking up the steps of the Southampton hotel, wonder to himself why and how he had got there.

It was inevitable that a night's sleep should sober him still more. He hated being called on a dark morning at some unearthly hour, in order to begin his travels. He felt ill-used. He had not had half enough sleep. Dr. Maturin's powerful influence was withdrawn. Colonel Vane was an insufficient substitute, although he came into Bob's bedroom twice before breakfast to rouse him up.

At the early meal, taken in the cheerless morning light in a gigantic coffee-room, of which they were the only tenants, Bob felt his courage for a trip across the Atlantic oozing out of his finger-tips. He had not realized before what a long way it was to New York. He thought dreamily over Maturin's advice, and the events of the little dinner the night before; and it occurred to him as funny that Vane should be at the doctor's beck and call. Acting under all these influences, he pushed aside his buttered toast, and said—

"I don't know if I shall go, after all."

Colonel Vane put down his knife and fork—he was comfortably luxuriating in a capital beef-steak—and stared.

"Not go! Why, you promised Maturin you would."

"I say, Vane, will you tell me one thing?"

"Certainly; any number."

"Well, then, what on earth makes *you* do whatever Maturin tells you like this?"

The colonel smiled in a sickly way, and, replied, "He's a man of great ability, a splendid fellow; I've known him a long time. In fact, we're—were like brothers." The colonel felt that this expression hardly hit the truth, but it was the best he could think of. And he wished to goodness Maturin had come down to Southampton himself to see Bob off. There would not be this shilly-shallying *then*.

Bob did not pursue the subject. He was reading a paper, and seemed fired by something he saw in the sporting column.

"By Jove!" he remarked; it's quite true. Pearl of the Sierras *does* race Tommy the Dwarf on the 26th—a fortnight from to-day—in Jerome Park, New York. Where's Jerome Park, eh?"

"Oh, a race-ground close to the city!"

"Well, I should be in time for it if I started now."

"Of course you would."

Bob reflected. He had finished his breakfast, and the coffee had warmed him. "He won't turn tail now," thought Colonel Vane. "I'll get him to write that letter to his uncle."

"We shall have time for a smoke, shan't we, Vane?"

"Yes. I want you for a minute in the writing-room, old fellow. You've got to write home—I mean to your uncle—you know."

"Must have a smoke," said Bob, "first. Come into the writing-room in five minutes. That suit you?"

"All right," said the colonel.

And he went to that apartment, while Bob hied him to the smoking-room of the hotel. Colonel Vane had not yet concocted a rough draft of the letter which he wished Bob to dispatch, according to Maturin's instructions, to Mr. George Betteridge; he was therefore not sorry of a slight interval of time in which to manufacture the sort of epistle which would *be most likely to strike* Uncle George's soul with bitter re-

morse, and also to leave indefinite the place to which his injured nephew had fled. "Put it anywhere in the backwoods of America," Maturin had said, "and mind and bring in an allusion to a cow-boy." Colonel Vane sat down and began to write.

Bob, meanwhile, had taken out his cigar-case. It was a present to him from his father. He looked at it, thought it was a handsome thing, and extracted a cigar. As he lit it, he remembered what his friend Colonel Vane, whom he really liked very much, had said about "writing home." It flashed upon Bob that if he wrote to Uncle George, he certainly ought also to write to his father or mother at Reigate. Then he proceeded, following a train of thought—an unusual and rather painful effort—to wonder what his "people" would say to his departure. And conscience finally smote him hard for going to America without even saying good-bye to his father, or receiving a farewell kiss from his mother.

"They're a stunning couple, after all, with all their faults," was the way in which Bob thought to himself of his respected parents. "And, by Jove! why should Vane want me to write to Uncle George, who's treated me so badly, and not write to the governor, who—who does the other thing? I'm hanged if I'll write!" Bob said to himself; and to avoid the colonel's importunities, he sauntered to the great entrance, put on his hat, and strolled out into the busy, noisy thoroughfare.

A sailor, who was trying to sleep off a last night's carouse in a friendly doorway, was being remorselessly roused by a Southampton policeman. The man's face wore an appearance of gloom and headache. He was recovering from the vinous illusions bred of the preceding evening. Bob felt that his own case was rather similar. The thought rushed on him again, "Why does Vane take all this trouble just because Maturin wanted him to?" Not being naturally a fool, he could not help asking himself if there were any hidden, cunning motive in the friendly colonel's mind? Then, if so, Maturin himself—But to pursue this line of reasoning led Bob straight up to the hypothesis that even his clever, pleasant, splendid brother-in-law Hartas Maturin might be a hypocrite and a plotter, and he turned off abruptly from the road leading to any such conclusion.

At all events, Bob did not think Vane had behaved quite rightly. He decided not to be guided by the colonel any

more. He did not mind losing money to him at cards, but he would be hanged if he should come between himself and his parents.

By this time his chance-directed steps had brought him close to the railway-station at which he had arrived the night before. An impulse, partly of resentment to Vane, partly of rebellion against being packed off anywhere by anybody, and still more of newly kindled filial feeling, made him walk into the book-ing-office, and inquire if there were a train to London soon. Yes, directly; it was due now, he was told.

Within a quarter of an hour Bob was speeding back in a first-class carriage to town, and Colonel Vane was hunting for the fugitive in a frenzied manner all over the Southampton hotel.

By the time that Bob had reached Reigate—he did not care to revisit Hartas just yet, for fear of being called shilly-shallying by his calmly resolute brother-in-law—he had altogether abandoned the idea of going to America at all just now. The charms of sport could wait. The contest between Pearl of the Sierras and Tommy the Dwarf was not by itself enough to drag him across the Atlantic. Besides, he wanted to be punctual at Oxford at the beginning of next term; and he did not wish to miss the delights of hunting—with a drag—in the neighborhood of the damp academical city.

His appearance at lunch was a pleasure to his mother, Mr. John Betteridge being away in the City.

“I suppose you stayed last night at George’s?” she said.

Bob replied in the negative.

“Oh, you were to dine quietly at Hartas Maturin’s, you said. Did poor Hartas put you up?”

“Well, no. The fact is, I slept at Southampton last night.”

“Southampton!”

“Yes,” Bob replied, without any hesitation; “I went down there with Vane—Colonel Vane. He wanted me to go to America, you know, on a sporting tour.”

“I wish Colonel Vane would mind his own business, Bob. And you went to Southampton to see about steamers?”

“Yes, to see about steamers,” Bob answered, glad of the subterfuge.

“I should have thought you could have learned all about them in town, Bob. I don’t know that Colonel Vane is the *best companion* you could choose.”

"Oh, he was at Maturin's last night."

"Did Hartas want you to go to America?"

"Well, no, I don't think he did. He tried to dissuade me."

"Quite right," murmured Mrs. Betteridge.

"It was Vane egged me on. There's no end of sport out there, you know, mother. I shall go some day."

"When your university career is finished, you might."

"Oh, that won't last long," Bob replied cheerfully. There was always the chance of its being cut remarkably short by premature rustication.

This same morning Dr. Maturin rose at his usual hour, and did not feel as if he had done anything particular the night before. He smiled at the thought of Uncle George's horror when he found his nephew flown as a result of his injurious language and treatment.

"Vane will see that he goes off all right," he thought. "Once on the Atlantic, he can't come back till he gets to New York, except on an iceberg."

But one of Dr. Maturin's letters that morning was of a nature to upset all his plans, and to cause even his excellently attuned mind a certain degree of strain and excitement. It was from his business agent, and told very briefly the news that on the previous day the plot of the proposed park had been sold by private treaty to speculative builders. The prospect of Manor End securing the Priory Estate was gone. So was all necessity for Hartas Maturin to fly in Uncle George's face by a gift that could now be of no benefit to any one.

"If I had known this six weeks ago," he thought, "it might have prolonged her life a little. Poor thing! Anyhow, she would have fallen a victim to phthisis. And of course it was for other reasons, besides the park scheme, that I wanted a free hand in money matters."

He despatched a telegram at once, before he touched any breakfast, to Colonel Vane, telling him to bring Bob back; the expedition to America he thought unadvisable just now, on second thoughts.

Colonel Vane, however, did not receive the telegram. He had spent an anxious and excited hour in the vain hunt for Bob all over the hotel. Thinking he might have gone off on his own account to the docks, he drove there as rapidly as possible. *But Bob was nowhere to be seen or heard of. The*

colonel paid the united bills of the pair, hurried off to the station, and was whirled to town. He thought he must tell Maturin at once of the fiasco. How savage Maturin would be, to be sure!

But in reality Maturin was not at all savage, as it turned out.

"I think, Vane," he said coolly, "for your age you're the greatest fool I know. But really it's not of importance to me where my brother-in-law goes to. I thought he would do well to have a trip; he's at a loose end here; and I wanted to pay out that old idiot of an uncle—the slanderous solicitor, the great mystery man. That was all. Next time I hope you'll see to matters better. My compliments to your wife. You'd better go home and see her now. Ta! ta!"

When Colonel Vane arrived at his own door, he did not think it necessary to say more than that he had been at Maturin's, and that the doctor had insisted on his staying the night. At which Mrs. Vane expressed her candid surprise; not that Dr. Maturin should wish to keep her husband, but that he should consent to stay with Dr. Maturin.

"I'm not a chicken, my dear, and I choose my own friends."

Mrs. Vane, being a wise woman, forbore to reply.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE ACQUAINTANCE.

AFTER the conclusion, not attended with the formality of "taking a degree," of Mr. Robert Betteridge's university career, which happened very soon after the journey recorded in the last chapter, and was due to a calamitous failure to get through "Pass Mods.," time seemed to hang rather heavily on that young gentleman's hands. He spent two months of the next summer on Scotch moors. He was regular even in his irregularities, such as riding in amateur steeplechases, attending at race meetings all over the country and picking up acquaintances recommended to him

chiefly by the possession of an unexhausted stock of cheerful frivolity. At the same time, it must be recorded in his favor that he kept out of serious scrapes ; steering his course with much ability so as to just avoid striking on the rocks, and being guilty of no greater crime than that of declining to enter any profession until, as he assured his father and mother when they suggested the advisability of adopting that course, " he had done enjoying himself."

A man's course in life is not always determined by the desire of parents and friends, or by conscious effort on his own part. One misty autumn day, Bob drove over to see his friend Staunton at Dorking, having been pressingly invited. Staunton was now no longer "of John's;" he was a young man with much common sense, and, having his way to make in the world, had prudently settled down to hard work in a barrister's chambers, where he was reading for the law. The Long Vacation not being over, however, Mr. Staunton was at home; and Bob was painfully surprised and rather disgusted to be ushered into a room where his friend was seated at a table covered with books and bundles of blue paper tied up in dirty red tape, and without any evidence about it of its being used as a smoking and drinking den.

There was even no armchair for Bob to throw his world-weary limbs into, after his usual fashion. Standing in the middle of the room, with a pipe in one hand and a silver-tipped riding-whip in the other, he greeted his friend with—

" Jake, you're turning into a smug!"

" Jake" was Staunton's Oxford nickname. It was a variable form of " Jacobus," or, in English, " James," his real name. At the place which Mr. Betteridge, senior, had described as the principal seat of learning in these realms, the fine fancy of youth had thus turned the classics to some useful account; it had changed a Christian name into a Pagan one, and had endowed a young man with a title reminiscent of Latinity. The sort of undergraduate that Bob chiefly associated with had also decided that those who devoted themselves, while resident at the university, to the acquisition of that learning for which it had come into existence, were " smugs." Bob's remark was strictly academical.

Staunton, after shaking hands, told his friend to sit down and light up. He did not think it necessary to deny smug-hood. He merely remarked apologetically—

"Well, you see, I'm obliged to do something. I'm not a *Cresus*, like you."

"And these pictures," Bob proceeded, with real indignation in his tones: "they seem to be a collection of fogies from some second-hand book-shop. eh?"

"So they are," said Staunton, cheerfully; "I picked them up cheap at a print-seller's in Bell Yard, Strand, you know, just opposite the Temple entrance."

"Ancestors, eh?"

"No; judges. Every barrister has a lot round his walls. It impresses people. Also I like to have 'em, now I have really taken to the law. It's no good doing a thing unless one goes at it properly—the whole hog."

Bob by this time had made unto himself as good an approach to a sofa as was possible under the circumstances, by placing two cushions on one chair, on which he reclined, and throwing his legs on to another. He smoked in contemptuous silence for a minute, and then said—

"You asked me to come, didn't you?"

"Yes; but I didn't know you would come quite so soon, or I'd have shoved all these books and briefs into a cupboard. I asked you because I hadn't set eyes on you for months. You've been in Scotland, I know; and I've been reading all through the *Long*. Now shall we go a drive? You've brought your dog-cart, of course?"

As a matter of fact, Bob's friend had asked him over with a view to giving him a lecture on the advisability of taking example from himself, and "doing something" in life. He would like Bob to read law, as he was doing. But Staunton was endowed with some tact, and saw that it was not a favorable opportunity for sermonizing. Possibly, however, he might get a sermon in through another channel. He suggested driving round by Coldharbor and back by Leith Hill, a course to which Bob willingly assented. He felt that he never could have too much of such a good thing as exhibiting his dexterity as a whip in a smart trap drawn by a two-hundred guinea roan.

This drive through the lovely lanes of Surrey, in its loveliest part, was delightful to both of these young men. Bob did not care much for natural scenery, and Staunton was contented to drink in its charm in silence. But the effect on the spirits of both was first soothing, then exhilarating; the quick, easy motion, the rush of the air against their faces,

the sweet smell of the country-side, the sleepy villages, the autumn-tinted coppices, the babble of the mill-streams. Bob had started in bad humor; but ill-humor requires fuel to replenish it, and what fuel was there in such sights as red sandstone eminences cut off in clean slices to make way for the road beneath, and crowned with groups of Scotch firs; in lazy teamsters jogging along beside their great contented horses; in the peeps of hills whose height was half concealed by their wealth of woods; or in chubby children playing at the roadside,—except when these same children darted in front of the horse's hoofs, which they very rarely did, not being of the quicksilver disposition of London urchins?

Fortunately, railway enterprise has not "opened up" the weald of Surrey and the northern heights that guard it so effectually as might have been expected and feared. A line of rail certainly cuts through it between Dorking and Horsham, and there is another which runs buried between the parallel ridges of which Box Hill and Leith Hill are the best-known single out-posts on either side. From Redhill to Dorking the railway is flanked by high chalky escarpments on its northern side, while to the south a level country spreads right away towards the distant South Downs; but at Dorking it enters between hills, and is imprisoned all the way till it reaches Guildford. Trails of smoke can be seen far below by those who travel over the Merrow Downs towards the celebrated "Silent Pool," or by wayfarers who come in the opposite direction from the summit of breezy Leith Hill through sleepy Abinger down to the rail's level at Gomshall; the shriek of the locomotives rises through sloping meadows, past wooded heights, along great grassy or heath-covered uplands, and comes as a pleasant and mellow sound to the ear of the tourist seated high on an eminence, admiring the magnificent prospect stretched before him. But it is a cross-country line, not connecting very directly with the great Metropolis, which is difficult and tedious of access from these sequestered hill-villages. And the railway always seems mastered by the surrounding hills. It threads its way deviously through them, slowly, as if it expected every moment to be brought up suddenly by a gigantic barrier, and as if it would be merely by the grace and forbearance of these same hills that it would finally emerge, if it did ever emerge, into Guildford station. Hitherto there have been few bands of *excursionists* whom the railway has brought down

even to explore this Surrey hill-district, much less to settle there; and the people and the life of the quaint little hamlets are as primitive as though London were three hundred instead of thirty miles distant.

Turning off the main road a little beyond the Rookery, the two friends jogged along in a southerly direction, and their course led them constantly uphill, in a zigzag fashion. There were cottages on each side here and there. Some of the pretty gardens in front had stone walls; others high grassy banks crowned by a hedge, and, when the gate let into the bank was swung open, it disclosed the care with which the cottagers had provided for a mass of autumnal flowers, as if to strew the path of on-coming winter and make-believe that he was a welcome guest. Each cottage seemed to have its small orchard at the side or behind it.

Then, when the houses were left behind, the two friends found themselves in a deep cutting, the high red stone walls of which were topped with pines, which seemed to stand along the edge as silent sentinels to watch what was going on beneath them. All down the rocky walls hung ferns and great pendulous sods and roots; there were blue-bells, too, and the dark green of the holly bushes, and briars clinging wherever there seemed the semblance of a foothold. The stratified lines of the sandstone stood out like red ribs underneath all this covering foliage.

A gate and a lovely common came next, and a road to the right directed "to Abinger." The friends turned instead to the left, and soon were in a magnificent forest of firs; and still the road led upward by a gradual ascent. Under the firs the road was miry, as if the sun never penetrated there. It was pleasant after this to come out on a wind-swept common, pink with heather, with cattle feeding here and there. A steady fall led to another little hill-village, in descending to which a glorious glimpse was caught of the view which has made Leith Hill justly famous. Soon the trap was in the village called Felday, and a pretty inn stood invitingly a little way back from the road. Bob did not remember ever having been here before, in this particular valley, guarded on one side by Leith Hill, and by Holmbury Hill, the nearer of the two, on the other.

Staunton broke the silence by saying, "If you'll pull up here, and come with me, I'll take you to see a friend of mine."

Bob stopped, nothing loth.

"Who is he? Anybody worth seeing?"

"Yes, distinctly."

"Well, then, I'll put the mare up at the inn; it will give her a rest."

And presently the pair of friends were sauntering leisurely through the little village street, and, after passing a stile and climbing a small sloping field, found themselves making their way along a pretty grass path between bushes of briar, topped with honeysuckle wreaths.

"The man I am going to see, Bob, is an oddity. That's how people would describe him. He lives generally alone, on the slope of this hill we're climbing. I can't quite make him out. I fell in with him when I was standing on the beacon one day, staring at the view, which is splendid."

"Oh, yes, I know," growled Bob. "I hate views. Is he a gentleman?"

"He seems like one; but that's not the point that strikes you when you meet him. I should like you to see his hut. He asked me to come again. He didn't tell me to bring anybody, but I suppose he won't object. He's queer, there's no doubt, but he seems wonderfully respected all round here. I asked about him in the village. Everybody knows him, at least by reputation. His name's Bastian. One thing which seems to impress the rustics is that he helps them when they want it—not that he gives them money, as far as I can gather. Then, though he is miles above them in culture and all that, he objects to being called 'sir'!"

"I should like to see him," said Bob. "A madman, probably; a mad hermit. By George, quite an acquisition to the neighborhood! What sort of a house has he?"

"You shall see directly. It's just over the brow of the hill. Let's move on. He's pitched his tent in about the best place for a view on the whole ridge."

"Does he always live up here?" Bob asked.

"No; in London generally."

"In London!" exclaimed Bob, disappointed. "Then he can't be so mad, after all."

A little more climbing brought them to the summit. Here the trees stood back, forming a circle of courtiers round the green throne of the hill. And the hill itself was plentifully covered, except on this topmost plateau, with low shrubs bearing the purple berries known to the indigenous rustics.

as "hurts," and to the outside world as whortleberries. They did not usurp the ground completely. There was the velvety softness of the grass left to afford pleasant walking along the little paths where no bushes grew.

"Let's go on to your original now," said Bob, in a loud voice.

"Hush!" said Staunton, suddenly grasping his arm. "There he is."

There certainly was a stranger, standing at a little distance from them, under a clump of trees. Bob was disappointed again in his appearance. He was expecting to see some dishevelled visionary. But this looked like an ordinary man of the world. As far as Bob could judge, he was of commanding height, with dark hair and high forehead, and dressed in a black coat with a cape to it. At first he was standing with head bare, as if enjoying the feel of the air on his brow; but as he came towards them he placed his slouch hat on his head. This threw his face into shadow; but you could see the clear-cut, delicate nose and strong chin, the very slight whiskers and mustache, and a pair of eyes of peculiar quality—eyes which were at once gleaming and restful, keen and yet full of an indefinable repose, as if their possessor had felt, but long ago parted with, all sublunary anxieties. Indeed, there was not a symptom of curiosity as to who Bob might be in his manner, as he took Staunton's outstretched hand. He spoke like a highly cultivated gentleman—another surprise for Bob; who noticed, besides, that he walked in a solid, impressive manner, as if a tower were walking. There was something monumental about the whole man.

Staunton, however, had made a mistake if he thought that his strange acquaintance would be as glad to see Bob Betteridge as himself. In fact, he refused to be drawn into talk. To tell the truth, Staunton had thought little of the mode in which he was to bring Bob under Rastian's influence. That Bob would be uncongenial to the stranger had not occurred to him. He had brought the two together, and had forgotten preliminaries. The situation was rather awkward. It was impossible to say in Bob's presence, "I should be glad if you could talk seriously to my friend here, who is rather a *harum-scarum*, rickety fellow," yet this was just what he wanted Rastian to do.

Now Bob like an idiot, failed at first to realize that he

was in presence of a somewhat remarkable man. He began to talk of trivialities. It was natural that he should choose as a subject of conversation that which he knew best.

"What d'you think'll win in the Newmarket Stakes?" he asked Bastian, familiarly, and with his usual air of good fellowship. It was to put an end to a painful silence that he made the remark, more than from an assurance that it was the best remark to make under the circumstances.

The stranger looked at Bob with his great reposeful eyes. Bob thought he was going to speak, but he did not. He put the question again.

"Midas," said Bastian.

"Midas! There's no such horse entered; at least, I think not." Bob's hand instinctively dived into his coat-pocket for his betting-book.

"He was a man with ass's ears," Bastian replied calmly. "You will find a good many such on race-courses."

Bob hardly knew how to interpret the remark. He gathered, however, that something connected with the turf was being complained of.

"Ah! you mean the tipsters. They *do* give a fellow gammoning tips sometimes. Been much of a sportsman yourself?"

"Yes," Bastian rejoined. "I have shot rabbits when I was a boy, and regretted it ever since I became a man."

Shot rabbits! And the stranger bracketed that amusement with horse-racing! If it had been anybody else, Bob would have laughed at him. He glanced at Staunton, to see if he felt amused. No; Staunton was frowning dismally. The conversation did not seem to be going off very happily, and Bob made one more desperate effort to reclaim it. He would try and treat the last observation seriously, as became his surroundings.

"Ain't rabbits *intended* for us to shoot—and eat?" he asked.

"Perhaps," said the stranger. "Many men of science will tell you so. Just as antelopes are made for tigers, and cancers to support the medical profession. We shall either tame or get rid of cancers, and tigers too, when the world is perfect."

Before Bob could reply—even if he had felt disposed to do so, with those wonderful eyes fixed quietly, almost pityingly, on his face—Bastian had turned abruptly round. He thrust

his arm through Staunton's, and walked with him a few paces onward.

"I knew you would come," he said; "I looked forward to it, for even a so-called 'insane mystic' needs human companionship at times. But your coming was darkened for me an hour ago, because it would not be you alone. You have brought"—almost fiercely—"a companion—a worldling. Don't you understand that solitude and thought, or talk with congenial spirits on great truths, is my one and most prized possession, and to deprive me of that is robbery? Are you going to steal my ewe lamb? Are *you* among the cockney sight-seers who hear that I live on this hill, and who regard my doings as the basis of a peep-show?"

Before Staunton could make up his mind whether to laugh or be angry, Bastian continued impressively—

"I asked *you* to come"—with a strong emphasis on the personal pronoun. "I meant what I said. Many people come here to pry into my concerns. From a few visitors—very few—I receive real mental and spiritual benefit. Whether I shall from you is hidden. Your friend had better not come again. I could do him much good; but listening to me is not in his nature, I fancy. It is becoming dark. Take your horse and trap from the tavern, and drive back to your homes. I bid you farewell!"

With a wave of his hand, the stranger walked slowly back to the clump of trees where he had first been seen, and disappeared from view.

"By Jove! a complimentary hermit," was Bob's comment.

"Hang his impudence!" said Staunton, who was naturally piqued at having a friend of his treated so cavalierly. "Not even to invite us to see his hut! Horribly impolite to you, Bob. Catch me coming to see him again! I suppose he was simply in a bad temper."

"No, he didn't seem in a temper. It was something different; something I don't understand. Come, he told us to go; let's go."

Bob began quickly retracing his steps. He did not speak all the way back to the little village inn. Staunton looked at him and wondered. "Either," he thought, "he is devilishly cut up by the fellow's brusqueness, or he's tired and seedy." To make sure which it was, he began to depreciate his former idol. Bob listened for some time, and then said—

"What eyes the fellow had! And what a chest! He's an athlete wasted, spoilt! A thousand pities. Confound it, Staunton, old chap! I believe there was something uncanny about your friend. I believe he's bewitched me."

"Don't call him my friend. After his rudeness to you, I shan't go near him."

"Won't you?" Bob began to whistle gently.

Soon they were bowling back along the lanes, now shrouded in deepening gloom, for the moon had not yet risen. It was a silent drive, for both seemed occupied with their own thoughts. When they arrived at Dorking, and Staunton was put down at his own door, he said pressingly—

"Do come in, Bob. You've caught cold, I believe, on that confounded hill."

"Not I," Bob replied. "Can't possibly come in now; booked to dine at home to-night."

"Well, well, I'm sorry. By-the-by, I forgot to tell you—Bastian is something of a spiritualist, I think; that was what attracted me to him at first. He can talk away like blazes when he likes."

"Something in the Madame Vesta line, eh?"

"No; quite different."

The two friends laughed; and, with a promise to call again very soon, Bob Betteridge was allowed to start off on his evening drive back to the family roof-tree at Reigate.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE FOG.

IMPRESSIONS did not usually last long with the easily distracted nature of Mr. Robert Betteridge, and it is highly probable that, if he had waited three or four days, and gone about enjoying himself meanwhile, he would have soon forgotten the encounter with the mysterious stranger on Holm-bury Hill. But just about this time he had no particular engagements. Racing was not going on anywhere; and his family were disinclined to entertain much, owing to their recent loss. *Ever since the Southampton fiasco, he had*

fought rather shy of Colonel Vane and his brother-in-law; and consequently Bob was thrown on his own extremely limited resources for amusement.

When he arrived at home from Dorking, there was not much time for anything but dinner and a smoke afterwards, and then bed, for he was uncommonly tired. Next morning, however, he rose with all the incidents of the previous day as fresh as if they had just happened. That the unknown had snubbed him, had behaved almost rudely to him, had evidently not desired his company, while wishing for that of Staunton, piqued him tremendously. Then there was that about the man that gave him a strange air of superiority.

"Wonder who the deuce he is?" Bob said over and over to himself while shaving. "Hang it all! what is there about him that I can't make out? He's a fine fellow, a swell of some kind; never met anybody the least resembling him before—I mean an unpleasant fellow, because he didn't take to me, confound him! Not worth troubling my head about;" and then Bob went, defiantly whistling, down to breakfast.

At breakfast he was rather gloomy and silent. Do what he would, he could not help feeling cheapened and depreciated, as if he had been put up to auction and had been knocked down for half what he was worth. He had felt a little of the same feeling on the memorable occasion when Uncle George had "ballyragged" him, as he figuratively expressed it. But nothing like what he felt now, for he did not care for Uncle George—thought him rather an old fool, in fact; whereas he was disposed to think differently of his acquaintance of yesterday.

He tried to get rid of the depression in his spirits by smoking several cigars in the conservatory. Then he went down to the Royal, and had a game of billiards with the marker, which lowered him even in his own eyes. Finally, he ordered a hasty lunch for himself at half-past twelve, and his dog-cart to be brought round to the front door at one, and soon after he was bowling away at a smart pace quite by himself, in the direction of Dorking and Leith Hill.

When near Dorking, he took a *détour* to the left, because he did not want to run the risk of meeting Staunton in the little town. A farmer whose cart he passed told him he could get to Holmbury quite easily through Holmwood Common and Coldharbor; and, after skirting the wooded base of Leith Hill for some time, he began to ascend the steep

road up its side. After passing through the quaint, high-placed Alpine little village of Coldharbor, the road led him directly out on to a bit of half-grassy moorland, and then bent suddenly round under the steep red escarpment, bringing him in no long time to the hill pass, where stood the tavern at which he had put his horse up on the previous afternoon. He again dismounted, gave his trap to the charge of the ostler, and strolled over the fields towards Holmbury Hill.

If his motives in making this expedition had been analyzed, they would have resolved themselves into two. Partly there was the very natural desire to wipe out humiliation, to retrieve the reverse he had suffered at the hands of the stranger; but partly, also, there was the more laudable ambition to consult an oracle, to know the worst about himself. It said something for the moral honesty at the bottom of Bob's nature that he was quite prepared to admit that he was a despicable character if he was told so on authority he could not dispute. He had sometimes thought himself despicable. An outside authoritative opinion to the same effect would be valuable, if unpleasant. He was determined to face the unpleasantness, as he would have faced going to a dentist. It was odd, he felt, that he should attach so much importance to the opinion of this eccentric and possibly half-insane solitary, but so he did; he could not help his feelings, much less account for them.

His yesterday's visit had impressed him with an idea that Staunton's strange acquaintance might be counted upon to be at the top of Holmbury Hill at all hours; he was therefore disappointed to find the place deserted, the only sound audible anywhere being the voices of children some way off blackberrying. Bob walked about impatiently for a few minutes. He would have gone to Bastian's cottage, only he did not know in which direction it lay, and on the whole he thought it would be best to wait and see if he would turn up at his "accustomed seat." He did not know what reception he might get if he ventured on a call uninvited, after the chilling experience of the day before.

There was, therefore, nothing to do but to light a cigar and pretend to admire the view. Blackberrying was out of the question for several reasons, one that it involved trouble, another that it was childish, and the third that it soiled the fingers. Bob would have chartered a little boy to pick

some for him, only the urchins whose voices he heard kept at a distance, half-way down the hill. He was sensible enough to be aware that the scene spread at his feet, with the oak-forested weald, and the distant South Downs, was a picturesque one, and he conscientiously set himself to the work of trying to appreciate it. Then he turned round, and was agreeably surprised to notice that he could make out the twinkle of the glass dome of the Crystal Palace in the reverse direction. He was engaged in quite cheerful recognition of this feature, when a voice beside him said—

“Is Staunton here?”

Bob turned sharply, and found Bastian.

“No,” he replied, quite simply, “he isn’t; I came by myself. I wanted to see you. You weren’t very polite to me yesterday. I wanted to ask you a question. Do you—do you consider me a *complete* donkey?”

Was the priestess at Delphi ever so consulted by a Greek member of the gilded youth? If so, she probably bent her head over the tripod to conceal her face, for even priestesses have a sense of the ludicrous. Bob, however, did not realize the humoroussness of the situation. He spoke in a tone of real anxiety.

“If I were to say I did, would you be offended?” the other replied; and there was not a trace of surprise in his manner.

“Not a bit,” said Bob. “Say it if you think it.”

“I only know,” replied Bastian, after a pause, “what I see written in your face, and that is that you are prone to self-indulgence. You are doing nothing worthy of yourself.”

“Why did you tell Staunton not to bring me to visit you again?” Bob asked. “It was not over-polite, was it?” He was rather relieved at the verdict just pronounced.

“A man must sometimes choose between politeness and truth,” Bastian replied; and added, “I confess I cannot estimate at a glance the complete character. I thought you were beyond my influence for good, and I do not choose to waste power or advice on every chance comer. But I knew this morning that you would visit me again. Then I said to myself that your coming argued the teachable spirit; the teachable spirit is never beyond my reach. What I say to you to-day is, Come, and come often.”

“I will,” said Bob, devoutly. His ductile spirit was already *attracted and mastered*,

His companion gazed at him silently ; then took him a few yards further on, where there was a hillock crowned with a single tree, and said, extending his arm—

"This is the place I love to stand on. Here you have a sweep of country which gives the idea of unlimited extent. Anything might be beyond those distant ridges ; Plato's Atlantis, almost. Why do we always think that there must be something stranger, better, more beautiful, than what we know of beyond a far-off line of hills ? This craving after the unknown is in itself an evidence that there is in man what cannot be satisfied by a single life. A dog does not admire scenery, or if he does he conceals it admirably."

Bob was a little surprised at the sudden change in the conversation. Under ordinary conditions, there was nobody more inclined than Bob Betteridge to sympathize with this canine want of appreciation of a "view." But the same influence which had drawn him out of Reigate to come to Holmbury made him equally submissive to his companion in the matter of taste in scenery. The natural man in Bob was inclined to think that the one feature which the view from the hill lacked was a race-course in the near foreground ; but his finer instinct did not fail to respond when the other went on after a long pause—

"This range runs from Hampshire, across Surrey, into Kent. How few know anything of it ! Up to this point it is partly chalk, partly red sandstone. Leith Hill is the end of the sandstone escarpment ; but that generous, warm-blooded vein in the soil crops up again at Red Hill ; thence the name. Now, if you look over in that direction, towards Portsmouth, you see that hill standing boldly out, don't you ?"

Bob assented and added, "It's the Devil's Punch Bowl, isn't it ?"

"No, Hind Head ; the Punch Bowl is only a scoop in the top of it. Then the line of redoubts retires backward a little, till it comes forward again in these three precipitous heights of Ewhurst, Holmbury, and Leith Hills. Turn your eyes to the east, and what do you see ? Again the hills recede, and again they come forward in yonder height, at least twenty miles distant, called Ide Hill. So the range is like a great wall of fortification stretched across the south of England, and Hind Head, Leith Hill, and Ide Hill, are the three natural towers on the walls. This slope in front of us, down from our feet to the clay level of the weald, is the glacis of the fortification."

"Have you been in the army?" asked Bob, in a tone of interest.

The unknown did not seem to hear the question.

"When I stand here, as I do often," he proceeded, "I feel like the commander of the fort, and I fancy that I am beleaguered, and that succor is to come to me some day from beyond that sea, the distant twinkle of which you can see—there, through Shoreham Gap. And then, as that idea fades away, another comes to me in its place—that I am in very truth one of the leaders of the invisible forces, the Army of Light, and that I am called upon to hold one post in the spiritual fortress against the attacks of sense within me;" he paused, and then added, "and of misbelievers outside as well. That succor, when will it come, I wonder?"

Bob looked in surprise and a certain degree of unexplainable fear at his companion. He had called him a mad hermit before he had seen him; could he really be mad? A religious fanatic, perhaps. Yet this man did not use the ordinary phases of religion, the religion he knew; and his manner and expression were as far as possible from those of the open-air "ranters." The man was a mystery. But though he had not seemed to address the last question directly to anybody, except perhaps the genius of the place, it seemed to Bob to call for some reply. So, after waiting a minute to see if his companion would turn his face round to him, or further explain himself, he said simply—

"I really can't tell."

The remark seemed to have a curious effect. Bastian turned round quickly, with a startled look. Evidently he had thought himself alone.

"Come," he said, "we will go to Leith Hill. I ought to show it you. And the hours wear on."

Bob was not sorry for the change, and the two walked briskly on, down into the hollow between the heights, and up again along the sweeping grassy back of the hill, till, after a quarter of an hour of climbing, catching peeps ever and anon, through masses of briar and heath and clumps of trees and out of sandstone excavations, of a distant expanse of blue low-lying country, they at length came in sight of the summit, with its tower built in times past as a landmark by some amiable enthusiast.

The tower on Leith Hill is forty feet in height, built of gray stone, with a winding staircase inside, and a flat roof,

whence an unrivalled view can be obtained. It is battlemented, and not unpicturesque. Its summit is a thousand feet above sea-level, the highest elevation in the south-east of England. Naturally enough, the tourist instinct has led visitors constantly to ascend this splendid eminence; but not in such numbers as to produce the ordinary effects on scenery of too great popularity. An orange-woman, a few photographs, and a small telescope—these are all; not enough to do much damage to a hill-summit that does not end off abruptly in a niggardly pointed peak, but more generously expands itself into a broad wind-swept plateau.

As the strange pair of walking companions approached the spot, Bob became garrulous. He had felt somewhat suppressed when alone with the solitary; the sight of human beings revived his spirits. On the other hand, there was evidently nothing attractive to Bastian himself in the companionship of the vendor of fruits and cakes, and the group of sight-seers who had assembled at the foot of the tower. He purposely avoided its neighborhood, bringing himself to a standstill quite fifty yards off.

"You would like to go up that," he said to Bob, pointing. "Yes, I thought so"—rather contemptuously. "Well, I will wait for you; the view from the top is no better than from here;" and he threw himself at full length on the grass.

"I say!" Bob exclaimed, *de cute curandá* never unmindful, even if the skin were another's, "the grass is wringing wet!"

The other did not answer, and Bob noticed that he seemed already far removed in thought from his immediate surroundings.

Bob shrugged his shoulders, and walked on. He was beginning, to tell the truth, to suffer from reaction; to feel a trifle less respect for this cultured "hermit," who did not snub him any more.

The ill-success of Bob Betteridge's school and college career had filled his soul with the strong impression that he was a worthless noodle. He was therefore prepared to welcome as a seer, or, at least, as a knowing fellow anybody who bluntly told him as much. But the seer in this case estimated the value of character by other tests than that of book-learning; and we fear that Bob was inclined to think little of him *because he seemed to think something of Bob.*

Bob accordingly conquered natural laziness, and ascended the "turris undique conspecta" out of sheer curiosity, and inspected as much of the scenery as could be discerned through a mist that had crept over the more distant landscape. When he turned his eyes once again on the near foreground, he perceived that his companion's position in comparison with the tourists had altered. The former had not stirred, but the tourists, some of them, had gone near him. Bob thought he appeared uncomfortable, and, with the most amiable intentions in the world, and yet wondering all the time at his own audacity in familiarly addressing this inscrutable being, he leaned over the parapet, and shouted—
"Hi!"

The inscrutable being, however, took no notice; he was so far off that perhaps he did not hear. But between him and the tower there was one of the tourist band, a middle-aged, mild-looking man, in a light great-coat, a light felt hat, and spectacles, who was quite close to Bob, and who also appeared not to hear. This was curious. Once again Bob, forming his hands into a trumpet-shape, bellowed with all his vocal strength—

"Hi! Do—you—see—the—fog coming—up? Hi!"

As for the inscrutable one, by this time Bob had come to the conclusion that he was either too far off or too tranced to hear anything. But the near tourist also took no manner of notice; went on diving into one coat-pocket after the other for a packet of obvious sandwiches, which he at last produced in triumph. The phenomenon of this man's inattention at once astonished and irritated Bob. He first looked about for a small pebble to throw down, as a forcible means of attracting his gaze to the tower. Finally, he descended pretty rapidly from the top, and walked up to the tourist.

"I say, sir," he shouted in his ear, "I've been yelling at you for the last half-hour!"

It was a slight exaggeration. Bob's voice at close quarters produced an evident effect on the man, who turned his mild, blue eyes round to see where the noise, or vibration, had come from. Just then one of his companions came walking up quickly, and, addressing Bob, said—

"Do you want anything from this gentleman? He cannot hear you. He is almost stone-deaf."

Bob apologized profusely, said he wanted nothing really;

and, after making one or two excuses, hurried off to the place where his acquaintance of Holmbury Hill still lay stretched at full length.

"The view was scrumptious," said Bob, insincerely, breaking in upon his reverie without the slightest compunction. "Shall we be moving?"

"Certainly," replied the other, springing from the ground. "Drive back the way you came. I will meet you in Holmwood. I have business there. I am going now to see if I can help some villagers who are contesting the right to block up an old footpath. If both parties will accept me as arbitrator, I see my way to a fair settlement."

"Very well," said Bob; "I'll meet you. I'll get the trap. But where—whereabouts shall we meet? Hallo! the man has gone!"

It was quite true. He had set off with long strides over the sand-hill and grass towards Coldharbor, and Bob was left alone to carry out his behest, or to refuse to do so, and choose another way home. Bob, however, had no reason at all to disobey, and a quarter of an hour later he was driving along as quickly as the roads would allow in the reverse direction to that taken in the earlier part of the day.

"Hanged if I don't think I've taken the wrong turn!" he said aloud, when he had got to the bottom of Coldharbor hill, and had been driving for half a mile along the road to the right. Inquiring from a passing carter, he found that he was going towards Ockley, and at once wheeled round. The delay had cost him a quarter of an hour, and when he sighted Holnwood Common, the mist had become thick, and he felt uncertain as to whether he could find his way back to Reigate. He very much doubted if Bastian would be anywhere on the road to meet him; but, on the trap turning a corner, there he stood, his arms folded, the quiet look of repose still being the most characteristic point about his face—so the "trappist" thought.

"Have you done your business?" the latter asked, as he pulled his horse up.

"Not yet. It is dangerous for you to try to drive back, not knowing the roads well, with night and mist coming on. Put up your horse at the inn here, and I will take you to the railway station, which is close by."

"It's devilish good of you," Bob replied; "but——"

"I don't want a man who has been friendly enough to me

to come a long way to seek an interview to run any risks in going back."

Bob submissively got down, and asked where the inn was.

"Not a stone's throw from here. Come!"

Leading his horse carefully along the road, Bob followed his companion till the gables of a quaint roadside tavern loomed above them, through the vapor. It was an inn on the Dorking road, and served as a place of refreshment to the men and beasts of the common itself as well as to wayfarers and passing teamsters. It now provided comfortable stabling accommodation for Bob's horse and gig; he would call or send a groom for them the next day, he said; and then—for his companion refused refreshment of any kind, to Bob's disgust—the two set off across the common towards the railway.

It was a curious fog. In parts dense as furnace smoke, elsewhere it lifted and cleared, and left wonderful oases of light, extending for hundreds of yards, in which every object was as perfectly distinct as the approach of evening rendered possible. Then, after walking on in this unexpected brightness for a short time the two travellers would suddenly step into a misty wall, and again find every feature of the landscape blurred and almost obliterated. The stranger led the way, and seemed to be in no doubt of his direction, marching on silently without hesitation or deviation. Suddenly, however, he halted at a fence.

"We are nearer to the line than I thought," he said. "We should have trended more to the right. Forgive me. I fear I was not thinking sufficiently of my duties as guide. The best thing for us to do now would be to get on the railway and walk to Holmwood Station that way; it is only about half a mile distant."

"All right," said Bob. The strangeness of this unexpected mist, the strangeness of his surroundings, his inexplicable companion, and the doubt of his exact whereabouts, must have acted prejudicially on the young gentleman's nerves. He felt, for no reason that he could explain to himself, inclined at once to do whatever his companion ordered, and yet to feel unreasonably suspicious of that companion's movements.

They crossed the wooden paling, leaped over a small ditch, and found themselves on the sand and gravel foundation on

which the railway lines were laid. The mist was thicker than before, and Bob could only discern the outline of his companion's form as he strode along a yard or two in front. He was feeling highly exasperated with the mist, when suddenly they both stepped clear out of it! Astonished at the phenomenon, Bob turned round, and saw the wreaths of thick vapor circling and whirling about, now touching the ground, and then appearing to rebound from it, and all the time forming a seemingly solid substance, which loomed dense and opaque like a murky wall. As he looked, the wall appeared to be moving away from him. It *was* moving away. One of those extraordinary caprices which fogs delight in revealed all at once the whole country for half a mile around quite clear; the mist seemed to part asunder on each side of the slightly raised railway embankment, like a curtain quickly drawn back. Bob almost gave a sigh of relief, though he knew the darkness might settle round them again as suddenly as it had lifted. There was the distant rumble of an approaching train in the Dorking direction, and he felt as if the removal of the thick obstructing vapor in its path must help the locomotive as much as it helped human beings.

His companion had stopped too. He now laid his hand quietly on Bob's arm, and said—

"That is a man walking on the line."

"Yes," said Bob, after a steady look in the direction indicated; "coming towards us."

They waited a minute to see who the man was. But he was a long way off, and did not seem to be hurrying. He was gradually lessening the interval of space between them, certainly, and they could see that he was walking with his head down and his hands behind his back, as if meditating.

"He must have been caught in the fog like us, and have followed our example, and tried to get to a station along the line," said Bob.

"Yes; but the train will be here before he is," the other replied. "See! there it comes."

The far-off rumble had ceased just before, for the approaching train had been hidden among slight hills and in trees; but now it rose into a deeper thunderous roar, and in the gathering afternoon twilight the lamp in front of the engine flashed round a corner and then came straight towards them.

"*By Jove!*" said Bob, realizing the position for the first

time, "he'll be caught if he doesn't get off the track."

But the stranger did not seem disposed to move. He was walking between the rails, and he had now come close enough for them to discern the details of his dress—that he wore a light over-coat, and a light squash hat half over his brow. But he was still quite a couple of hundred yards distant from where they stood.

Bob shouted, once, twice, thrice, raising his voice each time, till he positively screamed.

"Shouting will not help him," his companion calmly said. He was standing on the lines too, but his face had lost its look of ordinary repose. Even at that crisis Bob could not help noticing that it seemed contorted, and that there was a strange powerful radiance in his eyes, which he kept fastened on the man in danger and the fast-nearing express.

The engine-drivers evidently did not see the man. Bob's yell had been drowned effectually for them by the noise of the train itself. Suddenly Bob exclaimed—

"It's the deaf tourist, by heaven!"

"Run, and see if you can save him. But the train will be on him before you are there."

Bob obeyed mechanically. He rushed forward, shouting with all his might. The man advanced as deliberately as ever, in exactly the center of the rails, the most dangerous position at that moment in the whole county of Surrey. Bob ceased shouting, but went on running and waving his arms. The only hope was that the tourist might look up, or that the engine-driver might see him and stop. But it was the London and Portsmouth express, and Bob guessed by the speed with which it seemed to devour the ground that it would be hopeless to try to pull the train up, even if the danger were perceived. Why on earth did the man not just step off the line on to the safe path at the side? How incredibly fool-hardy!

Bob rushed on. But the thought suddenly struck him that his companion might have done something himself, instead of standing stock-still, and he turned his head while continuing to run. There the mysterious stranger stood, gazing intently before him, but his hand and arm were now upraised towards the sky, and he seemed to Bob's excited imagination to be invoking the invisible powers to his assistance, or, like some heathen wizard, to be warning back with imperious and *futile gesture* the blind mechanical force rushing furiously forward on the track. It was only for a moment that Bob

caught sight of him, and a spasm of anger, disbelief, and contempt shot across his mind. What a fool he was to be influenced in any way by a man who was capable of making such an idiot of himself at such a moment, when the life of a fellow-creature depended on their exertions! He turned his head, and ran on still faster, and his arms whirled more wind-mill-like than ever.

Now a gleam of hope flashed on him. It was plain that one of two things was happening. Either the man himself had increased his pace, or the train had slackened speed, the relative intervals between them had altered so perceptibly, more than could be accounted for by the fact that he was shortening the space by every step that he advanced. Still the wool-gathering tourist maintained his attitude, and there was nothing to show that *he* was hastening, or that he knew anything of his peril. No; it was the express itself which was moving more slowly. Probably the driver had seen the tourist, Bob thought. If so, why did he not whistle? And would he be able to pull up in the short, too fatally short, space which now separated him from the man on the line?

Before Bob got up to the tourist, the question was settled. There was no modern "vacuum break" fitted to the train, but for all that it came to a stand twenty yards on the other side of the unconscious wayfarer. The question was decided in favor of his continued existence by twenty yards. And now he realized the proximity of danger, seeing Bob so close, and waving to him; and, turning round, he for the first time knew that he had been within an ace of death. Bob had learned from recent experience that it was no use wasting words on him; he just motioned him to get off the line, and went on to the train. Then he shouted to the driver.

"Well done! I thought you'd never pull up in time. Phew! I *had* a race for it."

Bob was wiping the generous perspiration from his face. The driver, a dark-bearded man, put his head over the tender-rail, and looked at him curiously. Then he looked ahead, and saw the tourist.

"Two of you, was there?" he said. "To tell you the truth, I didn't see either of you till a minute ago."

"Why did you stop then?" asked Bob, amazed.

"You must ask the guard *that*."

The guard *had* now come up. "That's just what I want

to know," he said. "Who stopped this train? I never touched the break."

The driver looked at the stoker, and gave a low whistle.

"There's an incline here," Bob said, addressing the driver. "Perhaps that explains it."

"The incline didn't do it, sir," the driver said decisively; "that there bit of a hill ain't of no account to stop the express, unless it may be that it's double its usual weight, which it ain't at present. It was the break as stopped it."

"And I tell you," the guard shouted, indignant at having his statement doubted, "that the break wasn't touched; and what's more, if I'd put on the break hard all, it couldn't have pulled this train up so sharp as it *was* pulled up. That's flat."

"Jim, look after the engine; I'm a-going off to look at that there break;" and the driver leapt down, and ran along to the rear of the train, the guard following at his heels, and the stoker remaining in charge of the locomotive.

Bob stayed near the engine, and asked the stoker, a grinning youth, what *he* thought was the cause of the stoppage.

"Don't know," he grinned. "Never knew nothing' like it before. When he"—jerking his thumb in the direction of the driver—"felt her laggin' along—this 'ere hingen, I mean—he cursed and swore, sir; but when she stopped dead short, and he saw there was somebody on the line just ahead, he turned as white as a sheet, like."

The driver came back, looking half dazed. The passengers, with their heads out of window, many of them, were anxious to know whether there was an accident, or what. But the driver did not answer, and slowly climbed up the side of his engine, took his place at the handles, and then remarked in a low voice to his mate—

"It beats me, Jim. Break *has* been put on, and guard he didn't know it; swears he never touched it. Guard ain't no fool, either. *Somebody* must have put that there break on. There!"

The stoker youth grinned incredulously.

"Guard don't *know* he put it on; that's where it is," he said. "Put it on in his sleep, most like."

To which the driver simply answered—

"Let's see if she'll go now."

He turned the handle, and the engine started forward *slowly*. Gradually it increased its speed. The obstacle, *whatever it was*, that had hindered its progress, was removed.

And when the train arrived at Horsham, its next stopping-place, being a good ten minutes late there, the guard reported how it had been unaccountably delayed three miles out of Dorking, by "the break suddenly acting of itself," he supposed. At which the station-master was puzzled, and came provisionally to the conclusion that the break must either have "gone wrong," or been put on inadvertently. And so the matter was reported to the Company headquarters. The fact that the fog had made the rails exceedingly slippery, coating them with a clinging, shiny damp, was also duly mentioned; and the manager and science had to settle the matter between them.

Meanwhile the deaf tourist had not waited to acknowledge his debt to Bob for the latter's heroic efforts to save his life. Perhaps he did not, with "knowledge at one entrance quite shut out," even now understand how dire a danger he had escaped; he would certainly not be aware whether he owed his escape to the driver, to Bob, or to chance, so he had proceeded on towards Holmwood Station, and was already well-nigh lost to view in the dusk. And Bob himself was utterly at sea as to the exact manner in which the train had been stopped in time. Everybody seemed with one accord desirous to disclaim the act. His companion— Ah, there he was. What part had *he* taken in the matter? The sight of him brought back to Bob's mind with a rush the expression in his face, the strange attitude when he last saw him, and, anxious as Bob was to question him, he felt unable to do so.

In the stranger's face there was a worn, tired look. He walked beside Bob in silence, and now and then rubbed his hands together ("just as if he were washing them in imperceptible water," thought Bob), and sighed once or twice.

"Now I leave you," he said. "That is Holmwood Station. From there you can get to Dorking, and so to your home. I have work to do in this village. You may visit me again, but bring no stranger."

"I say," said Bob, who was driven at last to put one question to satisfy his burning curiosity, now that he saw the other on the point of departing, "excuse my asking, but did you—have you ever—saved anybody's life?"

A shadow of a smile flitted across Bastian's face.

"Spirit acts on spirit, transcending matter, here and everywhere," was all that he said in reply. "Now the mist is forming again. Farewell."

And so saying he passed through a gate leading on to a footpath which crossed the line, and was soon lost to sight.


Bob himself, in a strange state of conflicting opinions and emotions, reached his Reigate home about a couple of hours later. That day's experience, by exciting in him both respect and wonder for a stronger personality than his own, was destined to have a greater effect on his life than he could have imagined possible.

CHAPTER XV.

COLONEL VANE FEELS WORRIED.

It might have been supposed that Dr. Maturin would have found plenty to think about in the months that followed his wife's death, without sending his mind abroad into an excursion in the broad fields of philanthropy. He had heard enough long since from Bob Betteridge to be aware that "Uncle George" and Mrs. Vane between them were likely to be dangerous. They had venom, and they were prepared to sting. In guarding against this peril, by giving no opportunities for slander to seize upon, and by leading a quiet life of domestic decorum, most men in his position would have had more than enough to occupy all their thoughts. But the fact that Dr. Maturin *was* in this position at all showed him to be unlike most men; and therefore it was only in accordance with the paradoxical essence of his nature that on a fine June morning—a short time before Bob's expedition to Holmbury, already recounted—he should be looking out of his dining-room window in a dreamy way, his soul suffused with warm feelings of pity and charity towards the starving poor.

He did not pity them so much for being houseless. In that case they were likely to have their troubles soon over, by the merciful finger of death finding them out as they lay crouched in some ditch or on some door-step, and Dr. Maturin's philosophy did not look on death as a real evil. It was the slum-dwellers, especially the slum-children, to whom his heart or *his nerves*, went out in sympathy. From the window of his



pleasant sunny dining-room, he could see across his lawn and a sunk fence straight away to distant row of trees and a hedge, and then through the gaps in this the broad green expanse known everywhere as Pride's Pasture came into view. The near bushes were sparkling tremulously with drops of dew not yet dried; the sun was streaming into the room with a radiance that gave the idea that nature held no sorrow; and Dr. Maturin at that moment had in his hand a letter, requesting from his "well known munificence" a subscription for taking the choir-children of the parish church on their midsummer outing a month hence.

He intended to respond to the appeal liberally. But he was also thinking of another plan—a plan which would have the triple recommendation of providing Manor End with the park it had long sighed for, of giving himself a strong title to a Parliamentary seat, and of avoiding whatever danger might be involved in a large money gift.

In other words, Dr. Maturin had conceived the splendid idea of presenting the town in which he lived with the ownership of the whole of the green open expanse of Pride's Pasture.

It was not his way to be stingy because the immediate occasion for giving had disappeared. Other men might have rejoiced at the collapse of the old park plan, and the possibility thereby afforded, by locking up their pockets, of preserving pence with honor. Not so Dr. Maturin. What a magnificent boon the Pasture would be to all the poor children in the small streets about the gas-works! And every year the army of little houses grew bigger, and the number of small lives compelled to grow up in the valley of the shadow of over-population, and with no playground but the pavement, must increase. Already the Pasture was of double value to what it would have fetched twenty years ago. That value was progressive; nobody could say what it would reach in another twenty years. But its worth entirely depended on the fact that builders would give almost anything to be permitted to "utilize" such a promising site; and as Dr. Maturin never intended to sell to them, and had no need of money, the inducement to hoard up the field as a future Golconda was not one to appeal strongly to his imagination. Whereas the possibility of at once flooding hundreds of young lives with happy sunshine was a very real inducement to the philanthropic doctor, who never felt more resolutely philanthropic than on *this particular June morning*.

For his nerves had had ample time in which to recover from any shock they experienced from the circumstances connected with Mrs. Maturin's decease. They must have been a splendid set of nerves, capable of becoming firm and strong as iron in presence of an unexpected emergency, and capable, too, of developing exquisite sensitiveness to the most delicate perceptions of beauty or hideousness, pleasure or pain, as it existed in the outside world. And they were in subjection to an unfaltering will; at least, he had never known the occasion on which they asserted their freedom.

"I will give it, in fee simple. It shall be an everlasting Park for the People. Not large, but large enough." So Dr. Maturin soliloquized, looking out on his trim lawn and the pretty scene beyond. "It wants life; children playing about in the distance will make the whole scene pleasanter to look at, even for me in this house; and it will make life double as jolly for the children themselves, poor little souls!"

He strolled away into the hall, humming to himself—

"Exegi monumentum ære perennius; "

He took his hat and coat from the stand, and sauntered into the garden. The wind was keen in the shade, though the sun shone brightly.

"And those plotting scoundrels"—it was thus that Dr. Maturin really talked to himself and thought, in his gigantic egotism, of Uncle George and poor Mrs. Vane—"they will have nothing to found a charge upon. Giving a field is not like giving money. If Mrs. Vane ever shows her teeth, why, I have a hold over her husband, I rather think—a decided hold. It would be as well to remind him of the fact, perhaps. By-the-by, I wonder where the old fool is? I have not set eyes on him for ages."

At first Dr. Maturin thought of walking over to see Colonel Vane. Then he considered that it would look too much as if he were afraid of Mrs. Vane, or as if he valued the colonel's acquaintance. No; for this morning he would go back and work at his scientific pursuits in his laboratory; for he had taken to using the room again, undisturbed by the photograph of his wife, which looked out of its frame on the mantelpiece at him. If there was anything which Hartas Maturin especially despised and considered himself safe against,

it was superstitious terrors. At the same time, his artistic sensibilities demanded that the hearthrug on which his wife's body had been found should no longer be in the room, and some of the furniture had been shifted. That was all.

When another fortnight had passed, and Colonel Vane had not called, the doctor began to be suspicious. He had treated Vane coolly at the time of the Southampton fiasco, months ago, and he had intended to keep on doing so; therefore he was really surprised to find Vane venturing to return the compliment. For the colonel not to dine with him, not to borrow money from him, not to take him off to his club to gamble, was an abstention that required explaining. The only way that Dr. Maturin could think of to attract Vane was by inviting him to dinner; and when he did so, the colonel sent a polite reply, refusing on the ground of an engagement.

Dr. Maturin internally confounded his impudence—the impudence of a man to whom he had lent two thousand, and whose I. O. U. for half that amount he luckily possessed—and set himself seriously to consider the probable reasons of Vane's behavior.

Was it really a case of pique, or had his wife actually indoctrinated him with her suspicion? Was there a “coup” being planned against himself? The doctor felt himself strongly intrenched, yet desired to know what the enemy was doing.

It then occurred to him that Colonel Vane, being of a sociable disposition, would certainly be paying visits to his club, of which Dr. Maturin was also a member. The best plan to see him without the appearance of going out of the way to look for him would undoubtedly be to wait at the Junior Portman some afternoon from about five to six. From his intimate acquaintance with the colonel's character, Dr. Maturin knew that it would be a kind of miracle if anything could keep him away from his club for many days running.

The doctor had not been at the Junior Portman since his wife's death. When he walked into the newspaper-room, the personification of irreproachable and bereaved respectability, and took a general glance round, one or two friends at once rose from their lounging-chairs and came to greet him. If they had forgotten the fact of his bereavement, *which they were not likely to do*, after the “row in the

papers," his mourning costume and pale composed face would have been enough to bring the circumstance back to their memory.

Mr. Trigby, the eminent Queen's Counsel, wrung him heartily by the hand.

"Tremendously sorry to hear about it all, Maturin. I assure you you have my warmest sympathy in your sad loss. I hope you've been away for a change. You look as if you needed it rather."

"Ah, Maturin! Haven't seen you since your loss. Dreadful thing! dreadful!" murmured little Sir Hercules Mainwaring, a baronet of irreproachable lineage and amiably scientific proclivities, who had spent thousands in an ineffectual attempt to reach the central fire by boring through his Welsh property. "Getting over it now, I hope, eh?"

"It will take years to get over it," Dr. Maturin replied; "in fact, I cannot hope ever completely to make up for what I have lost, or to forget the shock."

"But you'll feel gradually more resigned," said the Queen's Counsel. "Efflux of time does a great deal in these cases."

"Ah! to be sure; so it does," the baronet assented. "Pon my word, *my* disappointment was killing at first. Don't know how I bore it. Reduced me to a shadow. But *I've* survived it, you see." He certainly had survived it. So far from being a shadow, he must have weighed at least fourteen stone.

Dr. Maturin shook his head sadly, and was thinking how he could most politely get rid of these well-intentioned condolences, more especially as Sir Hercules already showed signs of beginning on the crust of the globe, his favorite topic, when Mr. Trigby said something, to his surprise, which really interested him.

"You should bestir yourself, Maturin. Shake off this gloom by action. You should throw yourself into something or other—politics, now; you were always a politician. Why not stand for Parliament?"

"I might think of it later on," the doctor replied. "But there's no chance of a dissolution for years, is there?"

"No chance of a dissolution for years! There now! I tell you what, Maturin"—and here the barrister took Dr. Maturin aside into a window recess, Sir Hercules leaving the party *reluctantly* to bury himself subsequently fathoms deep in *the pages of a scientific journal*—"I've heard to-day what I

wouldn't tell everybody, but I know *you* can keep a secret." Mr. Trigby paused. "You *will* keep it, won't you?"

"Religiously."

"Then, I was talking to a member of the Cabinet, whose name I need not mention, and he told me *as a positive fact* that the Prime Minister has resolved on a dissolution in September—three months from now!" Mr. Trigby liberated Dr. Maturin's top waistcoat button, and retired a step to have a better view of what effect the portentous intelligence would produce.

Dr. Maturin grasped his hand, and said cordially—

"Thanks. A thousand thanks for telling me. I must really think about politics—about standing. Anything to throw off the load that I have borne since—since my dear wife's loss. That was a terrible affair, Trigby."

"Ah! yes, I suppose so," replied the barrister, less feelingly than before. This was evidently not the line to take with Trigby, Dr. Maturin saw.

"I say, though," said Mr. Trigby, rather anxious, "*where* do you intend to try for, eh?"

"Oh, nowhere. I assure you it's a new idea. You suggested it. Very likely I should find Parliament a tremendous bore when I got into it."

"That's humbug," said the other, decisively. "But mind, don't come poaching on my preserves. I've been nursing Walchester for years; given 'em two public fountains and half a hospital. You must go somewhere else, Maturin; you must avoid Walchester. Trespassers will be prosecuted, you understand."

"Very well," said Dr. Maturin, smiling; "I shall be sure to avoid infringing the law. You certainly have won the right to the representation of Walchester. I shall go elsewhere if I go anywhere, which is improbable."

"Think over it, and give yourself a change first; you look fagged. Good-bye;" and the two men shook hands warmly.

Colonel Vane had not yet appeared. Dr. Maturin sat down, ordered tea, and took up a newspaper. As far as the outside public could judge, the political current was running quite smoothly, with nothing to show the nearness of the cataract which Mr. Trigby had predicted. Dr. Maturin was glad he had seen Trigby. His information was important.

The reason which had kept Colonel Vane away from Free-mantle House for long was not so much Mrs. Vane's solicita-

tions as wounded pride. The colonel, on his financial side, was a toady and a humbug; but he had his self-respect, which had been injured by the proceedings with regard to Bob at Southampton, and this feeling had, no doubt, been strengthened by the hints thrown out now and then by his wife as to the suspicious nature of Janet Maturin's death and the general undesirability of Maturin as an acquaintance.

It was a combination of these feelings which had dictated Colonel Vane's refusal to dine with Dr. Maturin. But it would be incorrect to ascribe too great an excess of virtue to the colonel in the matter. He had satisfied his wounded military *amour propre* by snubbing Maturin, and now had a wish to renew the friendship, which meant so many good dinners, and other conveniences, such as the more or less free use of somebody else's money. Then there was a distinct anxiety on his part as to the debts to Dr. Maturin he already contracted. Suppose the doctor should turn disagreeable, and demand payment? So his financial conscience still kept him falsely true to Dr. Maturin.

It was, therefore, with considerable effusion of manner that he greeted the doctor at the club when he made his appearance there this afternoon, rather late. He had not expected to find Dr. Maturin there. The latter, on his part, at once saw that the colonel was longing to renew the old relations; any lurking fear that he had entertained before of the colonel as a plotting spider sitting in his web at Finchley was at once dissipated by the sight of him and his extra friendly manner. Still, there was the female spider at Finchley, possibly a more dangerous insect; and Dr. Maturin was determined to give the colonel a hint that he was in his power. Afterwards, if he saw that Mrs. Vane was not likely to prove an enemy, he would adopt a different and more amicable policy; but now he could not afford to do so.

The colonel began by condolences on Dr. Maturin's "seedy" appearance, which were received in a frigid manner. He then passed on to express his extreme sorrow for not having been able to accept the dinner invitation. Dr. Maturin brushed aside these trivialities, and said—

"I wanted to see you. Has your wife been talking against me at all lately?"

"*I don't think you're a favorite of hers,*" said the colonel, *taken rather aback.*

"Just so. But she says nothing distinctly slanderous, eh?"

"Oh dear, no!" said the colonel, who would not have told Dr. Maturin if she had.

The doctor, of course, did not believe a word of this.

"Then there's that money you owe me, Vane. I am sorry to press you, but I've got various expenses I didn't foresee. Could you make it convenient to let me have a check the day after to-morrow?"

The look of blank dismay on Colonel Vane's face was by itself a sufficient answer to so unexpected a demand.

"Well," said the doctor, "I can't wait for it forever. You had better see about it. It's two thousand in all; but I want the one thousand to begin with. The rest can wait."

"I *must* see about it," said the colonel, ruefully. "I must look up my bankers. The fact is, I'm afraid I've overdrawn lately, and——"

"Then overdraw more and pay me back. Hope to see you some other day to dine. I can't stop now. Good night." Dr. Maturin turned his back on the embarrassed veteran, and walked away.

The wildest desires came into Colonel Vane's soul. To pay the money, and have done with Maturin, that was the first. "Would to Heaven I could!" he said to himself. Then could he not take his wife's view, and perhaps prove Maturin a villain of some kind, a man to whom money ought not, on moral grounds, to be repaid? No, he knew nothing against him, and of course disbelieved his wife's vague accusations. Sleep that evening did not visit the colonel as he sat in his armchair at Finchley after dinner. Dr. Maturin had murdered sleep. He had rather vague notions of the legal method of recovering debts, but visions of his house occupied by brokers, and his family turned into the street, did not tend to soothe his disquieted brain.

A week later—the colonel having looked on each day that passed without bringing with it an execution as a distinct gain—he saw in the local paper an announcement which caused him to stare; which he read once, and then read again. It was to this effect:—

"A PARK FOR MANOR END. MUNIFICENT GIFT.

"*The local Board, at their meeting on Tuesday, took into*

consideration a letter from the eminent philanthropist, Hartas Maturin, Esq., M.D., of Freemantle House. This communication expressed the desire of the writer to make over to the local authorities of Manor End the magnificent open space known as 'Pride's Pasture,' and which hitherto has formed a portion of the grounds of Freemantle House, to be devoted to the use of the inhabitants forever. It need hardly be mentioned that the letter was received with warm expressions of the appreciation of the Board for the generosity which had prompted Dr. Maturin's gift. The only condition which the donor has made is that the cottage in one corner of the ground, now in the tenancy of an old servant of the family, shall not be disturbed during the lifetime of the present occupant; and that after his death it shall become a lodge for the use of the park-keeper. In his letter the donor of this princely gift expressed his sorrow that the former scheme for providing the borough with a public pleasure had fallen through, and his hope that the gift of 'Pride's Pasture' would in some degree compensate the inhabitants for their previous disappointment. There cannot be two opinions about the noble generosity of mind of which Dr. Maturin has given a new proof in his latest act of benevolence. Manor End is indeed to be congratulated on possessing such a citizen. The sad bereavement which Dr. Maturin sustained some months ago is well known, as also are the distressing circumstances attending the decease of the late lamented Mrs. Maturin. It speaks volumes for the public spirit and kindness of heart of this distinguished medical man, that he should be able, at a time when his recent loss might well excuse him for thinking only of private matters, to forget domestic griefs and come forward as a benefactor to every individual resident in the neighborhood. There is only one feeling about the gift in the locality, and it is earnestly hoped that the shock which Dr. Maturin has recently undergone will not have the effect of rendering continued residence at Freemantle House distasteful to him, and thus depriving the borough of one of its wealthiest, kindest, and most philanthropic residents."

Then followed a full description of the grounds which were to be made over to the public. Colonel Vane was *enormously surprised* at this latest outcome of Dr. Maturin's *peculiar character*. His first thought was, "What an idiot!"

Then it occurred to him that Dr. Maturin could not want his thousand pounds very much, if he could afford to throw away a valuable property in this way; and this was a distinctly comforting thought, as it seemed to postpone the prospect of brokers in the house to a distant future. But was it really a piece of idiocy of the clever doctor's? On second thoughts, Colonel Vane was inclined to call the gift a "move;" but in what direction or for what reason he could not divine. He took the difficulty and the newspaper in to his wife. If anybody could solve the puzzle, he felt sure it was Mrs. Vane.

The latter, however, was then solving an even more difficult dilemma—how to manage five children, including one infant in arms, with the help of a single nursemaid of average incompetence. She could not attend to her husband for an hour, after which time she joined him in the dining-room in a jaded condition. She read the notice about the park carefully over, and put the paper down. Here, then, was the confirmation of what Mr. George Betteridge had told her; here was the cause of that quarrel between Janet and her husband brought into public view. She was got rid of, and he was free now to play ducks and drakes with his, or rather her, property, and all with odiously selfish ends in view. Mrs. Vane had great difficulty in checking herself from launching out against Dr. Maturin before her husband. She felt angry with the latter for not seeing through the doctor; for still being his friend, in spite of her hints.

"Well my dear, what do you think of it?" asked the colonel.

"It does not surprise me, not in the least."

"Do you think it's pure benevolence, philanthropy—that sort of thing?"

"You," replied his wife, sharply, "are in a better position to judge of his motives than I. *You* are still Dr. Maturin's friend."

That evening Mrs. Vane wrote to Mr. George Betteridge, asking him, as a particular favor, to call upon her without delay.

CHAPTER XVI.

BANISHMENT.

BUSINESS engagements of an absorbing kind prevented Mr. George Betteridge, solicitor, of Red Lion Court, from attending to Mrs. Vane's summons as soon as he would have himself desired. He wrote to say that he saw no chance of being able to repair to Finchley for a fortnight. Would not she send him a letter, which of course would be strictly confidential, stating anything about which she wished to consult him? Mrs. Vane replied that she did not trust letters, and would wait till Mr. Betteridge *was* able to visit her.

"An excellent woman of business!" was Uncle George's comment.

Nearly three whole weeks elapsed, and then he wrote to say he would call next day. But Mrs. Vane was suffering from weakness, and, being ordered to the seaside for ten days or so, the interview between the two did not actually take place until quite a month from the first announcement in the newspaper of Dr. Maturin's gift to North London.

When Uncle George arrived at the house at Finchley, he had heard nothing whatever on the subject of the park. He did not take in a local Manor End paper. He had heard of the previous plan for providing the locality with a public playground having fallen through, and he had since then regarded the matter as closed; had given up the idea that Maturin could be proved a scoundrel in that particular way. Mrs. Vane at once showed him the newspaper, which she had kept by her since the day on which her husband first brought it in for her to read.

On finishing of the perusal of the paragraph Uncle George did a very singular and uncommon thing for him. He gave a low whistle.

"But, my dear madam," he said, "you ought certainly *to have let me know* something of this before. Let me see; *it's almost five weeks now, five weeks ago, that this an-*

nouncement came out. I ought to have been informed of it at once."

"I object to doing business, especially business of this delicate kind, by letter-writing," said Mrs. Vane.

"Very good, admirable as a general precept; but you might have sent me the paper itself, now."

"I thought you would see it. The fact was in the morning journals as well, I saw—only a small piece, though."

"Was it indeed? Dear me! how vexatious! I must have missed it altogether," said Uncle George. "Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk. Here we are, at any rate, a month late, and the question now is, what is to be done?"

"Can we do anything?" asked Mrs. Vane. "You see, it's not like the money he wanted to give; it's not like a money gift."

"It seems a new idea—substituted no doubt, for that subscription he was intending, which was of no good when that other plot of land was snapped up by the builders. It's a cunning stroke of Maturin's. Maturin," went on Uncle George, in a decided tone, "is cunning enough for anything."

A very common occurrence in Mrs. Vane's household interrupted the conversation for a moment—the irruption of four sturdy children, and their immediate dismissal upstairs.

"You have a regular nestful, Mrs. Vane. It must be a great comfort." Uncle George thought he could personally do without that form of comfort very well. "Now, let me ask you—have you heard anything more, from Mrs. Longstaff or anybody, that would throw light on our inquiry?"

Mrs. Vane shook her head sadly.

"Your husband, Colonel Vane," Uncle George went on, feeling that he was treading on rather slippery ground; "you said, I think, that he was a friend of Maturin's. You don't suppose, do you, that he is in any way bound to Maturin—that he is in his power?"

"Oh, dear, no!" said Mrs. Vane, cheerfully confident. "He is only a friend, and Dr. Maturin and he meet at the club, and dine together, that's all. He may have lent my husband a little money once—but no doubt, if so, it has been repaid."

"I hope so," said the solicitor. "Now, I need not tell you that this action of the 'great philanthropist,' Mrs. Vane, confirms *our* view of my poor niece's death." (Mrs. Vane nodded.) "Yes; but how to bring the matter to light? The

public ought certainly to know the reason of this precious philanthropist's charitable offering—that at bottom it is merely selfish ambition to enter Parliament; *that* they ought to know, at the very least. As to disclosing the quarrel on this very matter between husband and wife, I really don't see my way to that at present. If we can't lock him up for murder, he can lock *us* up for criminal libel, or get damages for slander. Don't you think your husband would know anything more of Dr. Maturin's concerns—of his character?"

"No. He might, but it would not be advisable to ask him," said Mrs. Vane, thoughtfully.

"I must think what is to be done. This park business is quite a surprise to me." Uncle George took up his hat to leave. "And if you hear of anything more, drop me a line. Stay; no, you won't do that. Well, I am in at my office every day till five or six. I should be honored if you were to visit me there, dear madam."

The next day, as fate would have it, Dr. Maturin met the Vane nursery taking its collective walk abroad, and, with his excellent memory for faces, at once stopped the caravan, patted the children on the head, and asked the nurse how her mistress was.

He was passing on, when Willy, the eldest, obeying some mysterious instinct, stooped in the road, took up a small pebble, and flung it at the doctor's leg.

He was the only boy, and perhaps felt bound to protect his little sisters from maleficent influences. He knew that his mother disliked Dr. Maturin; that was quite enough warrant for *him*.

Dr. Maturin, on his part, stared at the hostile demonstration. Should he rebuke the youngster before the nurse? Should he take any notice? It would be lowering his dignity to pay the smallest attention to a child's action. The nurse too, he thought, had not noticed it. He turned on his heel and walked away. Nevertheless, the boy's rudeness rankled in him. It could only arise from maternal influence at home. It was a revelation, not by any means a pleasant one, of what some people thought of the widely admired, the generally respected, the wealthy and benevolent Dr. Maturin! And Mrs. Vane allowed her household to entertain such ideas of *him*, did she? This must be put right without delay.

He believed that his demand for repayment from Colonel Vane *had had* its effect. At all events, not a word had been

uttered anywhere in disparagement of his "princely gift" of Pride's Pasture; only one chorus of enthusiastic praise had been heard. It was almost too late for Mrs. Vane, or Uncle George, or anybody else, to malign him as to that transaction, now five weeks old. Still he disliked the idea of dogged hostility, even if kept secret from him. Some fine day Mrs. Vane might still spring a mine under his feet by concocting with Uncle George a realistic disclosure of his quarrel with his dead wife. How would that story look as a "poster" at an election, for instance? It might lose him the election easily. It would be best to banish Mrs. Vane, or bind her to himself in some other way.

Willy's stone-throwing had, therefore, an important result. Dr. Maturin determined to meet Colonel Vane at the club casually, and ask him to a quiet dinner. Most men would have sunk prudence and shown resentment by an attempt to injure; Dr. Maturin was resolving to bind Vane all the closer to him, to heap benefits on his head, in proportion as Mrs. Vane proved ungrateful and hostile. Colonel Vane did dine quietly with Maturin, and the doctor, he thought, had never been more charming, never half so attractive, in fact, for the colonel went home in a state of wild jubilation at a certain proposal which Maturin had made to him, and which he had accepted.

Although Mrs. Vane had told Uncle George that it would not be advisable to try and find out things against the doctor from her husband, she yet decided to talk to him about his friend. She would not appear to pry or be inquisitive. She would merely persistently lead the conversation in the direction of discussing Maturin and his affairs. She knew by instinct that this was the most likely way of procuring the information she desired. She thought, that as her husband had been so often with Dr. Maturin before Janet's death, the doctor must have dropped remarks now and then indicative of being hampered by his wife in money matters; perhaps he might have spoken of quarrels. How could she tell what secrets gentlemen told each other when alone? What she especially wanted to know was, *had* there been real serious quarrels about money? Had Maturin said anything which would lead one to suppose that he had a burning ambition about Parliament? Had he ever mentioned the park to Colonel Vane?

Yet Mrs. Vane would have done anything rather than

produce discord in her own family. If she found her husband taciturn or inclined to be suspicious, she would simply leave the matter alone. Her duty, she felt, was first to be a good wife; afterwards to do her friends a benefit, including a dead friend like poor Janet. Janet *was* dead, and the necessity of finding out the mystery of her death was less pressing, less of a duty, than that of ordering her conversation aright in her relations with her living family. After all, she and Uncle George *might* be mistaken in their view of Dr. Maturin. There was always that dim possibility.

On the morning after dining at Freemantle House, Colonel Vane came down to breakfast singing. Mrs. Vane had not heard him do such a thing since he resigned his commission.

"Was your dinner pleasant, dear?"

"Oh, delightful; most delightful!"

"The doctor has got over poor Janet's loss, then?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. He gave me some first-class hock. That's one of the things Maturin always does know how to do. His wines are unequalled."

"That's the result of having money," said Mrs. Vane, sententiously. "I suppose he did not mention about that park he intends giving?"

"Oh, yes, he did. Don't you believe in him now? Who else would think of such generosity to London street brats?"

"Well, perhaps he's better than I thought. But he always intended giving a park, did not he? I mean, before he lost his wife?"

"May have done so," answered the colonel, unsatisfactorily.

"What's this I saw in some paper," Mrs. Vane went on astutely, after allowing an interval to elapse of conversation on ordinary subjects, "about Dr. Maturin going into Parliament?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. Stop, though. Yes, young Bob Betteridge did say something about it once—said he'd heard it from his uncle, I think. Maturin was riled about it, I remember."

"Oh, was he?" said Mrs. Vane, rather incautiously showing her interest in the subject. "And what did he say about it? Does he intend standing, do you think?"

Now, Colonel Vane, being not by any means deficient in shrewdness, had already noticed one peculiar fact, which was *that his wife was unaccountably coming round to a better*

opinion of Dr. Maturin, at least in appearance; and now he began to think it odd that she should be anxious to talk about him so much, and especially to learn anything about him that he—Colonel Vane—could disclose.

"He would make an excellent member," said Colonel Vane, evasively. "Have a little more bacon, my love. It looks like rain. Are you thinking of going anywhere to-day?"

Mrs. Vane was quite clever enough to know that this was a danger-signal hoisted by her husband. She therefore left Dr. Maturin as a subject of conversation to a more convenient period. The entrance of the children, indeed, soon banished all connected conversation to a distant limbo, and it also banished the colonel to his study to smoke, according to the ordinary morning routine.

Mrs. Vane was surprised when, about half an hour later, her husband asked her to come into the study. He had something important to say.

"Talking of Maturin," said the colonel, "reminds me of an important step I am thinking of taking, my dear, and which I hope you will fully approve of."

"What on earth is that?" Mrs. Vane was apprehensive of any new step that had any remote connection with Janet's husband.

"Sit down, my love. Maturin is a real friend, I think. He has great influence with some fellows in the House, you know—some members of the Government. He's in the swim, is Maturin, and he has actually interested himself in obtaining for me a lucrative appointment—a lucrative appointment." The very words were honey to the colonel's lips. He paused to see what effect the announcement would have. His wife turned rather pale, and said—

"Dr. Maturin has?"

"Yes; the post of vice-consul at Athens, which is vacant. It'll give me seven hundred a year, besides my retired pay."

"And have you accepted it?"

Now, the colonel had much respect for, and no little awe of, his wife, and he did not like to confess the fact until he had put all the advantages of the offer before her in the brightest light.

"Accept it! Why, it's a thing most men would jump at. One of the best berths in the consular service. It's generally given to somebody who's spent all his life in that sort of employment, not to a rank outsider like me. Seven hundred a

year, my dear! Just think what that will be, in addition to my pay——”

“But some of the pay is taken away, surely, when you receive an appointment—a civil appointment?” Mrs. Vane could not help interjecting.

“Hem! I don’t remember any such beastly rule. I don’t believe there is one, although the War Office is capable of it. But, as I was telling you, it’s a clear seven hundred a year, and—what’s still better—precious little to do for the money, as far as I can gather from Maturin.”

“It would mean that we should have to leave England.” Mrs. Vane spoke in a subdued, restrained voice, as if she did not trust herself to more vigorous utterance just at present.

“Ah! well, of course it *would* do that,” the colonel admitted, with a sigh. The vision of the Junior Portman flashed across him, not to be visited in a hurry when he was looking out on the Gulf of Salamis. But he put away the thought of banishment from his beloved club, and from Pall Mall’s shady side; the feeling of having something to do, or pretend to do, in life, of not rotting away, would compensate for that loss. Besides, had not Maturin assured him that a first-rate club, frequented by English, existed at Athens? “You must remember, my dear, every rose has its thorn—ahem! We shall—we should live in a capital climate; heaps of jolly English people; parties, yachting, shooting on Mount, Mount something or other—I forget its name, but it’s a classical mountain, you know—good school for the children; openings for bringing the girls out advantageously; and—and, in fact, nothing *could* be jollier altogether,” the colonel concluded, almost out of breath with the eagerness of his encomiums.

“And Dr. Maturin—did he say why he offered you this appointment?”

“Why? Oh no; it was out of friendship, pure friendship. It’s not every fellow——”

“And did he press you to accept it? Does Dr. Maturin want to get you and me out of England?”

“Get us out of England, my dear! That’s one way of looking at it, of course. Yes, he certainly *did* press it—pretty strongly, too.”

“Dr. Maturin, Henry,” said Mrs. Vane, “may have his own reasons for not desiring our presence near him. Do *you really*,” she proceeded with vehemence, “believe him to

be your disinterested friend, as you pretend to do? I tell you there is not a more calculating man living. If he did not kill his wife, he made her life unhappy by quarrels over money matters. He is not a gentleman—say what you like, I shall never believe he is a gentleman—or a man of real principle, or a friend to anybody from whom he does not expect some advantage. Philanthropy! The very word makes me sick when I hear him called a philanthropist. The only creature, the only member of the human race, for whom he has a real affection is Dr. Hartas Maturin, and for his sake he would willingly sacrifice the happiness of every other person living. Dear Henry,” she said, rising from her seat and clasping her hands, “do allow me to guide you for once! Have nothing to do with this offer. He is *not* your friend.”

Colonel Vane had rarely seen his wife so moved, and he felt that sickening sensation which comes upon a weak nature when circumstances compel it to fly in the face of a strong one. The circumstances here, however, were overpowering. The colonel leant his back against the mantle-piece, pulled savagely at his mustache, and said—

“You don’t understand the position. Do sit down, and don’t make a scene. It’s right I should tell you I owe Maturin money; you know I told you I should have to borrow. The other day he pressed me for payment, and I——”

“You mean that he threatens you,” said Mrs. Vane, whose worst fears were beginning to be realized. To be banished from England at Dr. Maturin’s will! The very idea was odious. “How much is this debt?” she asked. A wild desire to pay it off, to pay Maturin what her husband owed him, to rescue him from this nightmare influence, came over her. Would that she could! “You only told me that you had borrowed a hundred pounds somewhere, and I had no notion of that debt being to Dr. Maturin. And I was saving in the house to help pay it off.”

“A thousand, my love! I said a thousand, I am sure.”

Colonel Vane would not disclose any more just now. It need never be necessary, he hoped, to reveal the total amount of that debt; the extra thousand that he owed he devoutly trusted would never come to his wife’s ear. Why should it, if Maturin remained friendly, as he certainly seemed to be at present? Colonel Vane did not believe that the doctor had any *acknowledgment* of that extra thousand in his

possession. Certainly he held no I.O.U.—those embarrassing documents, which the colonel considered an iniquitous arrangement of lawyers. If the worst ever came to the worst, he could do what governments occasionally did—he could repudiate.

But the one thousand was a sufficient burden to Mrs. Vane's mind. It was a startling surprise. Her faith in her husband went down several degrees, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that her belief in his inherent weakness of character and tendencies to idiotic extravagance and mild gambling went up. She would keep tight hold of the purse-strings in future. But where was the use? The mischief seemed to be done already. Gulping down her indignation and alarm, like a brave woman as she was, she determined to make no "scene;" only to find out whether her husband had irrevocably pledged himself to accept Dr. Maturin's offer.

"I am sure I cannot understand," she said, "how it is you manage to get through so much. What is the good of my saving, if you are always spending? Now, tell me about this debt. Do you mean that you are obliged to accept this post—to go to Athens—because you owe Dr. Maturin money? Does he expect you to pay the thousand out of your salary?"

"Oh no, no! Maturin would be above that," the colonel rejoined.

"He did not seem above demanding the money back, and threatening you about it, at any rate."

"Well, my dear, possibly he was hard pressed at that time. I cannot certainly see how he can be in need of cash. But you never know what private speculations fellows may be running into."

"Quite so; I never do," said Mrs. Vane, simply.

"What is the good of talking, anyhow?" the colonel went on. "I do owe this money, and here is a way of paying it off, and of giving me employment and a good salary as well; and giving you pleasure too, my dear, and all the children. A change from Finchley will be delightful."

This point of view would not at another time have been without its attractions even for his wife. But to accept anything from Janet's husband was a horrible necessity.

"You don't seem to see," she persisted, "that by taking a post from a man to whom you owe money you place yourself still further in his power. It is humiliating."

"It's much more humiliating to go on owing, isn't it? Then I don't serve under Maturin when I'm vice-consul, as you seem to think. I shall be under Government. Maturin will have nothing whatever to do with me."

"But he got you the appointment," Mrs. Vane replied.

Unconsciously, her husband had hit upon the argument of all others most likely to reconcile her to the step he proposed taking. It was no use telling him of her suspicion that one, and not the least powerful, of the clever doctor's motives in expatriating the colonel and his family was the desire to get rid of awkward inquiries about Janet's death on the part of Mrs. Vane. Once more, as strongly as she could, she urged and implored him to have nothing to do with the tempting offer. They would contrive to pay Dr. Maturin somehow.

"My dear," Colonel Vane replied, with an authoritative wave of his right hand, which trembled slightly, while his left was buried in his pocket, "it is, as I have said, *no use talking*; the thing is settled. I have accepted the appointment."

"You might have told me that to begin with," Mrs. Vane said, rising.

"I wished to break the news to you gently."

Mrs. Vane left the room. What could she do? Communicate with Mr. George Betteridge, and ask him to help her? But she had the good wife's habitual dislike of exposing her domestic affairs to the gaze of strangers. How could she tell the solicitor of her husband's extravagance and its results? She felt that she must give up the pursuit of clues to Janet's death. As the necessity of so acting became quite clear to her, a sudden rush of compunction and a feeling that she was basely deserting her duty to her dead friend came upon her; now that it was impossible to hunt the murderer, if there was a murderer, to earth, the longing to do so was doubled in intensity. If her husband would only defy Maturin! But then—no, there were her children to think of, and the borrowed money *could* not be repaid. Mrs. Vane was not a woman given to tears or puling lamentations, yet one choking sob of mortification, pity for poor Janet, almost remorse, did for a moment rise to her throat.

That evening, however, she sat down and wrote to Uncle George, a letter wrung from her not by her own wishes, but by *hard necessity*. It was quite useless, she said, for her to

think of engaging any further in the business of which they had spoken. Her husband had decided to leave England at once for an indefinite time, and she felt she should be acting wrongly by offering help when she was almost certain that she would not be in a position to render it. At the same time, Mr. Betteridge had her warmest wishes, she need hardly say, in his attempt to elucidate a matter which certainly still appeared very mysterious to Mrs. Vane. If she were not likely to be busy in packing up, she would have invited Mr. George Betteridge to come and see her, or would have called at his office; but under the circumstances she must reluctantly decline to reopen the subject, on which she had come to a final decision.

The effect of this letter on its recipient was what might have been imagined. Uncle George had been already sufficiently snubbed and discouraged in his self-denying efforts to unravel the fate of his niece. Mrs. Vane's note crowned the edifice. Taken together with the hint that she had let drop about her husband and Dr. Maturin, he shrewdly suspected that the latter had something to do with this determination of Mrs. Vane's. Very likely he had induced Colonel Vane to put pressure on his wife. Why, too, this sudden move from England?

"She's a good woman, and I pity her," Uncle George thought. "I should like to know more about her husband's relations with Maturin, but I can't ask her, and she's too proud to volunteer the information."

"If I hear anything more," was his ultimate determination, "I will follow it up. But I will not try to act as a detective any longer. It is too utterly useless and humiliating. My poor little Janetta, how fond I was of you! As for Maturin, in spite of appearances, philanthropy, reputation, and all that, I do firmly believe in my soul that he was privy to your death; but I can do no more. I can only leave him, if he is a murderer, to the justice of God."

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. ROBERT BETTERIDGE SEEKS A PROFESSION.

A BRISK conversation was proceeding over the lunch-table at Southwold Towers. It was about a fortnight after Bob's first introduction to Bastian. The interlocutors were the master of the mansion and his wife. As there was no visitor, no need existed for any mincing of words or troublesome abstinence from exact truth-telling.

"I don't believe," Mr. John Betteridge was saying—"I really don't believe, Emily, that you've been near Hartas since—hum!—poor Janet's death, last autumn; a year ago."

This was a subject which Mrs. Betteridge hated. Still, it was time that she should justify herself to her husband, more especially as his next remark was—

"Why not ask him over here to dine?"

"From what I have heard, John, I don't think that Janet *was* really so happy with him."

"That's George; he's told you that."

"Well, and if it's the truth?"

"Tut! why didn't she tell *you*, if she was unhappy?"

"Women don't like to talk about their husbands. Then, as George says, she was very plucky. She did not *complain* to him; only asked his advice about money matters. George says he really thinks she wanted him to advise her to yield to her husband about it. But he couldn't, he says. I only wish he *had* told her to do so; then——"

Mrs. Betteridge stopped abruptly.

Her husband looked at her.

"*You* don't believe George's ideas—crack-brained ideas—about murder, Emily? You're too sensible."

"I don't know what to believe. But how can I be as friendly as before with Hartas? I cannot, John. If you invite him, I shall be surly and silent all the time, I know."

"Then I'd better *not* invite him. Bob believes in him, anyhow."

"Yes; he would believe in anybody who gave good dinners, and was what he calls a jolly fellow." Mrs. Betteridge was

glad of the opportunity offered of changing the subject. "George thinks Bob is going to the dogs. There isn't a better judge of that sort of thing than your brother. I told him of this new acquaintance at Holmbury. George at first was rather taciturn—only shrugged his shoulders in an irritating way;—it seems to mean so much more than it expresses, you know. Afterwards he began to talk about Bob, and it really seems that they had a regular quarrel some nine or ten months ago; George blew him up for his idle life at college, and I suppose Bob did not relish being lectured."

"Very likely not. Youngsters don't," said Mr. Betteridge, sententiously.

"There! Youngsters! That is how you always look at it. I believe you'll call Bob a youngster when he's sixty. He's over twenty-two now, and everybody thinks it ridiculous that he has no profession, and that he does not seem to care about anything, except racing."

"My dear"—Mr. Betteridge roused himself with the intention of putting his own and Bob's side of the question briefly and pointedly—"young men who know that they will have money *don't* work. It's not natural. If he keeps out of real mischief it is all we can expect. Perhaps he will develop political tastes by-and-by, and go into the 'Ouse."

"Political tastes! Pooh! He doesn't know a Liberal from a Conservative. If you ask him, you'll find he thinks Lord Russell is a Tory. The fact is, he is living on his expectations, and you encourage him."

"He is living on what I allow him, and it is fortunate—ahem!—that I am in a position to allow my son a substantial yearly income."

"I don't think it fortunate at all," his wife retorted. "I think it is a great misfortune for any young man to have nothing to stimulate him to exertion. And George said——"

"My dear, you said yourself that he and his uncle had quarrelled. How can you expect George to take an unprejudiced view of his goin's on?"

Mrs. Betteridge felt that this was an argument with a certain amount of weight in it. But she must not show any weak approval of his views to her husband, so she proceeded—

"George takes a great deal of interest in the boy, naturally, and I am sure would advise us for the best. I am perfectly *certain* that Bob has gone off to Holmbury again. You see

how foolish he is. He takes up with any fad for a time. A person has only to talk glibly to get a tremendous influence over him. Who knows anything about this strange creature he has picked up, or that he will use his influence in a right direction?"

"He's a friend of that young Staunton's, and *he's* steady enough. I'll drive over some day and see him," said Mr. Betteridge, as a sop to Ceberus. "Bob does not seem to be any the worse for knowing him, so far. In fact, he told me that the fellow, whoever he is, was urging him to take up some line of life—just as you do yourself, my dear."

This was news for Mrs. Betteridge. She determined, for the five hundredth time, to "watch" Bob, and see, if possible, what effect his new acquaintance was producing. Poor Mrs. Betteridge! Her life, when she was not laying herself out to be agreeable to her husband's City friends, whom in her heart she despised for their snobbishness and pride of purse, was mainly occupied, and had been for years and years, with this very same watching of her only son—with results which hitherto had not been commensurate with the labor freely bestowed. How could she expect to make way against the atrocious spoiling system adopted by his father?

However, the operation of natural forces, quite apart from the will of either Mr. or Mrs. Betteridge, did produce just that effect which the latter had been desiring. Bob, since the visit to Leith Hill Tower, and the adventure with the tourist on the line, had been over almost every day regularly to Holmbury, in pursuance of his strange devotion to the ally picked up for him by Staunton. During all that time he had not seen Staunton—had not even heard Bastian speak of him; and it pleased the weak soul of Bob Betteridge to feel that he was actually cutting Staunton out in the friendship of the original who would not allow everybody to call him friend.

Bastian, on his part, probably felt at times that the very obvious admiration of this new worshipper, this dandified devotee, this young man of the period, was a trifle inconvenient. Finding that snubs and serious conversation did not drive Bob away, he began, it must be admitted, to entertain almost a Johnsonian liking for this modern Boswellian adherent. Bob, at any rate, was sincere. He had, it seemed, no self-seeking motives in following up the acquaintance-ship; and *sincerity* of any kind and in any person was a

passport to the sympathy of the strange dweller on the Surrey hill.

Who and what was Bastian? The general theory of the residents in the neighborhood of his small cottage, those who knew his solitary mode of living when there, was to the effect that he had been crossed in love, and that for this romantic reason he had adopted a life which was to a certain extent that of a hermit. He could not, however, rightly be called a hermit even by them, for several reasons. One was that he went in and out among the poor cottages for miles round, and was noted for his cheery talk to the commonalty folk whom he met in his rambles, and for numerous acts of benevolence; another, that he lived in London, or at all events not at his cottage, for the greater part of the year. A different theory, advanced among persons who lived at greater distance, who did not know of the excellent repute in which Bastian lived, and whose information about him had been distorted by passing through many mouths, was that he had "fled from justice"—that he was an escaped convict, in fact, or something answering to that unwelcome description in some foreign land or British settlement. This was grossly improbable, of course; but it had the effect of making him interesting, which was the object desired.

In reality, there was nothing so romantic as that in the history of the man who was fated to have considerable influence over the lives of many of the personages in this story. He came originally of a stock which was French—an old Breton family, which had been domiciled in England for many generations, and by intermarriage had become practically English. The family had settled in the south-west of this island, in an out-of-the-way part of Cornwall, the immigrant among its progenitors having apparently been led to that corner of England by a fancied resemblance of its climate to that of Brittany.

Bastian had enjoyed one great advantage. He had not been educated as ordinary boys are educated. He was allowed, for the first fourteen years of his existence, to pick up knowledge as best he might; and it was not so much a knowledge of books—though he had a habit, even when a child, of poring for long hours over the most abstruse and apparently uninteresting volumes in his father's library—as an intimate acquaintance with the ways of the fisher-folk, with the odd superstitions still haunting the Cornish villages and

with nature, as seen in the wild rocky landscapes and grassy downs, framed in a setting of almost purple sea, which abounded near his home.

Perhaps the Breton blood in his veins made him all the readier to imbibe, and the quicker to understand, the weird tales of the Evil Eye, and of Brownies, which every day of his boyish life he heard related as gospel truth. Then, at the age of fifteen, he, an only child, his mother being now dead, was sent by his father to gain tuition in the classics, and in English literature and History from the clergyman of the place, an enthusiastic scholar and a great friend of the poor. This was a man who had fitted up a little lodge on the cliff, to which some rough-hewn steps led down, and who, on stormy nights insisted on remaining there, with a couple of brightly burning lanterns exhibited at the little square of window-glass, to warn sailors out at sea not to approach the coast, for there was no lighthouse near. Often and often did the boy accompany the old man to his look-out place, and once had been rewarded—for it *was* a reward to him—by being permitted to scramble down the cliffs with his patron, and help rescue some mariners wrecked on the beach below.

Then what, it may be asked, had led him away from such surroundings, which gave him so much freedom and harmonized with his strongly imaginative nature? He had not deserted any home worth speaking of. His father, late in life, had "taken another mate"; and the Cornish home, which he had lived in and loved, became loud with a woman's harsh voice always wrangling and scolding, and not even refraining from abuse of her own husband. In fact, old Mr. Bastian had made an execrable choice. As long as the poor old man lived, his son remained to help him, and to mitigate, as far as might be, the worst effects of the ill-temper of his spouse. On his death, he had spent most of the small sum left to him on travel, evolving in the course of it, theories of his own on many subjects.

On returning to England, he tried to put his theories in practice. He settled down in Whitechapel, and devoted himself to the cause of the poor. A distant relative had left him by will the small freehold, with a cottage on it at Holmbury; there he retired for a time each year, supporting himself and satisfying his very modest needs, as far as food went, out of the fruits and vegetables grown by his own hand in his own garden.

He set up first in the East End as a volunteer school-master—to adults, not to children. It was characteristic of him that he began to teach when other people had ended their day's work. But he had noticed the listless, idle, and often vicious evenings of the men and lads who hung about taverns and street-corners. Why not employ them ?

He first attracted them. He started a musical club, where smoking was freely allowed, as well as bagatelle and dominoes and cards (under his own supervision). Then he gradually inserted the thin end of the educational wedge, by interesting talks or lectures about different places he had visited, or books he had read, or exciting events of history. Finding the lowest street loafers to have some ideas of politics, he got them to start debates on political topics. He divided the " House " into Liberals and Conservatives, and acted as Speaker himself. Then later on he attacked a younger class—those who had just left school, and were thrown on the world to forget in three months what they had learned in three years.

These young " larrikins," just growing up into hobbledoyhood, he set to carpenter, gild, draw, paint, carve. At the same time, he talked and read to them, sometimes tolerably abstruse books, for he was not afraid of reading or talking over their heads ; he believed it was a good thing to make them hold their heads higher in trying to understand what was said. And, however matter-of-fact his talk or reading might be for most of the evening, he always ended up with something imaginative—some poetry, or Plato. This he did, too, with his adults ; it was something for them to take home with them, to do instead of flowers or pictures ; it counteracted the horribly materialistic influences of their everyday life, and insensibly taught, besides, that there were even more important matters than money-getting. It also counteracted—what he did not believe in—the current idea of scientific truth, which had penetrated as a depressing atmosphere even into the poorest quarters.

" My teaching," he used to say, " *is* scientific. It does not ignore the noblest part of man's organization—the soul."

At the same time, he was not altogether satisfied with the mental pabulum afforded by Sunday schools and ordinary spiritual agencies, though he encouraged his pupils to go to church or chapel. Standing between the "materialistic" *day school* and the unsatisfactory Sunday school, he was, as

a matter of course, misunderstood and disliked by both.

As for children, them he pitied and loved. He did not try to teach them. "Teaching children," he used to say, "is a special grand gift belonging to but few women and fewer men. I don't possess it. I don't therefore teach children; I only cure them sometimes."

Those who called him a hermit he laughed at, although his London life was not less solitary and ascetic than that he led at his cottage. His holiday was not hermitizing, he declared. He defended it by saying, "I believe it is good for everybody to go into a 'retreat' sometimes; not only for High Church clergymen."

To Bob he did not tell the story of his life. What would have been the use? Bob, though a sympathetic companion, was hardly a suitable confidant, he felt.

"You've been in the East, haven't you?" asked Bob one day drawing his bow at a venture. He thought the East was exclusively peopled by fanatics and mystics and queer people of every kind.

"Never futher East than Poplar," Bastian replied. "Stop; I did go to Cologne once."

He had not taken him to his cottage, either. His life at present would have seemed to Bob's untutored spirit an abject renunciation of all that made existence possible. Their meetings took place on the grassy hill-plateau; Bob was also permitted now and then to accompany Bastian in his excursion to villages round. It was impossible for young Betteridge not to notice the air of respect in the greeting he received.

At first Bob did not care to talk of that mysterious stoppage of the train. But as the weeks passed on, he summoned courage at last to address a direct query to his companion.

"Was it you," he asked abruptly one day, "who saved that fellow's life? I mean, did you make that train pull up suddenly? *Have* you power to do that sort of miracle?"

"Nonsense!" Bastian replied at once. "Have you never been taught that the age of miracles is past? It is the universally accepted doctrine. Every national school-master knows that there is no power but natural law anywhere, and that all natural laws are already found out, does he not? Nobody believes that faith can remove mountains any more, so nowadays they use dynamite to blow the mountains up.

Perhaps it is wise. Of course, the train stopped from natural causes. What made you think that I stopped it?"

"Something you said—about spirit and—and something else—matter, I think."

Bob did not choose to say that he had seen his friend in an attitude of apparent incantation on the railway line. And the latter was evidently disinclined to talk on the incident at all. He changed the subject to the one which Bob most of all disliked—Bob's own future. There was this difference between his method of handling that distasteful topic and his mother's, or Staunton's or Uncle George's—which was, that he did not condescend to reason, to answer objections, to engage in a controversy. He had a way occasionally of stating his beliefs, simply, strongly, so that they sounded like truths; if not accepted, there he left them. It was certainly a little startling and disconcerting to Bob, who had hitherto regarded Bastian as a being far removed from knowledge of the world and its professions, when the latter suddenly put to him the point-blank question—

"What is your occupation in life?"

The question was very much like that put by Uncle George on a memorable occasion, when Bob answered that his object in his life was to enjoy himself. He did not feel at all inclined to venture the same reply now. In contact with commanding simplicity, he too, became simple. He answered—

"I have no occupation, I am afraid."

"Everybody has some occupation; everybody is either engaged in the business of duty or of pleasure. Which is yours?"

"Pleasure, I'm afraid," said Bob. "But I didn't know you knew about business, and that sort of thing."

"You *will* adopt some occupation." Bastian spoke with quiet confidence. "Dare to be yourself—to do what you yourself know you are fit for, not what other people think you are fit for. It is demoralizing for you to lead an idle life. You are rich, and need not do anything, but you will."

He stopped suddenly—it was on the road which Bob surmised led to his cottage—stretched out his hand, and said, "Good-bye."

Bob was mortified at the abrupt dismissal.

"You have never shown me your hut—your house, I mean."

"What is there to amuse you there? My fare is hardly

luxurious enough to attract you. You are probably accustomed to carpets. It is useless to take you there yet."

"When may I come and see you again; not at your cottage—I mean at the top of the hill?" Bob asked ruefully. He would not obtrude himself if his companion was impolite enough not to invite him inside his house.

"Come again when you have an object and a work in life;" and before Bob had time to answer, his companion was out of sight behind the firs and larches.

"Uncommonly rude," was Bob's first thought.

"Why should *he* bother about me?" was his meditation during the drive home.

"Wonder how he *does* live? I should like to see the inside of that cottage tremendously," thought inquisitive Bob. "Well, it shows an interest in me to give what he thinks good advice. What *shall* I be, or do?"

Bob by this time had reached home, and, by a mental process, a state of good temper. He felt flattered that he should be the object of this strange man's solicitude—this teacher who spoke as one having authority. After all, it might be better for him to try to occupy himself; he *had* a great deal of leisure, which hung heavily on his hands. And it would please his mother—a consideration which, we regret to have to record, came after the others in Bob's rambling brain. Yes, he would be something. What should he be?

The next stage in the progress of thought was to construct airy castles, the result of his own future efforts. Bob soon saw himself a valued member of the Legislature. By a natural evolution he became, a minute afterwards, the Right Honorable Robert Betteridge, Chancellor of the—No, he had no turn for arithmetic; he would not meddle with the Exchequer. Foreign affairs? Yes, that would suit him very well. He disclosed to his father that evening his desire to get into Parliament, or, at all events, to get a position of some sort.

"Not *infra dig*, you know; and not with too much work."

"Something diplomatic, eh?" asked Mr. Betteridge, at once astonished and pleased at his son's remarkable conversion to the belief in the necessity of a profession. "Something in the ten-to-four line, eh?"

"Ten to four? Let me see, that would be six hours. By Jove! I don't know if I could quite stand all that, governor."

"With an hour's interval for luncheon in the middle of the day, of course," replied the prosperous City man. "You would get that in any decent office."

"I wouldn't go into a merchant's office," said Bob, decidedly. "Something that leads to Parliament would suit me best, or that helps a fellow to get there."

"Ah! Not the commercial line, eh? Well, then, how about the Stock Exchange? Don't know where you meet so many nobs as on the Exchange. *Most* gentlemanly. Don't like it, eh? What do you say to the India Office, now? Several men of the highest family belong to the India Office. I know Sir Theophilus MacGregor, too. He's nearly at the top of the tree there. A year or two there, and then you might try for the 'Ouse, and you'd be fit for Under-Secretary for India at once. Very likely Sir Theophilus would assist you to get a berth—a good berth."

"Thanks," said Bob, attracted by the prospect. "If you'll give me a *note* of introduction to him, I'll call to-morrow morning."

"Extraordinary and most gratifying," thought the City potentate. "Bob is turning over a new leaf." And that evening he communicated the intelligence to Bob's mother. In his own mind he already saw his son ruling two hundred million Asiatics as Governor-General.

"We must wait and see how it turns out," she said, with the caution inspired by a tolerably accurate acquaintance with the usual duration of her son's enthusiasms.

It turned out as follows. The next day Bob went into London, had a snack of lunch at his club, and called early in the afternoon at the palatial office in Westminster, where Sir Theophilus MacGregor was to be found. Bob sent up his card and his father's letter of introduction. He was kept waiting in a cold ante-room for half an hour, at the end of which his views as to the desirability of finding a position of usefulness and emolument at the India Office had altered considerably for the worse. Finally, he was admitted to the sacred presence of his father's friend, Sir Theophilus, who was a magnate of the first importance, being a member of the Indian Council, and a great many other things besides.

The great man was at one end of a portentously long room, at a desk. The desk was placed under a window, which was high up in the wall, so that no view was possible, and the *small fire burning* did not serve to keep out the unseasonable

chill. Bob thought it looked like a prison, except for the handsome carpet, and the comfortable chair the great man occupied. He pitied him sincerely. He felt that *he* would not have greatness thrust upon him at the price of sitting there all day. Bob presumed he was there all day, for he seemed just like a superior clerk.

Bob sauntered towards the table, and wondered whether it was the habit of India Office officials to go on writing when visitors were announced. If so, the habit should be altered. He was not himself accustomed to stand when he could sit down, so he threw himself carelessly into a chair. The great man looked up from his work and started; then he bowed stiffly. Bob gave an easy nod, crossed one leg over the other, and said cheerfully—

"Well, I looked in, you know, about that letter. I don't know what the governor's said in it, but the old boy told me that very likely you'd be able to give me a leg up."

"I suppose you are, like many others, looking for a berth in this office?" said Sir Theophilus, examining Mr. Betteridge's letter again. There was a touch of contempt in his voice as he said this, and then glanced at Bob.

"Just so," Bob replied.

"Then, I'm afraid I can't assist you materially. I know your father, and should be glad to oblige him; but the crowd of applicants—properly qualified, men with high honors, and so on—is so great that you would have to wait years, even if you were approved as candidate for a post. Your father says you were at Oxford, I see."

"Hope he isn't going to ask me what honors I took," thought Bob.

Sir Theophilus did not ask that, but he asked something almost equally disagreeable.

"You left Oxford in 18—, a year ago; have you been—hem!—occupied in anything since that time?"

"Hang the fellow!" thought the candidate. "How they all ask about my occupation!" "Nothing very much," he said aloud.

Sir Theophilus smiled, and again expressed his extreme sorrow; but he really did not see his way to helping Mr. Betteridge. He would be delighted to do so, if he could.

"Well," said Bob, rising, "you can think it over. Don't you find this room jolly cold? Here, I'll stoke your fire for you." He went over to the grate, and in the pure benevo-

lence of his heart, and solely in order to do the great man a kindness, began to shovel some coals on.

"I beg you to stop, Mr. Betteridge," said Sir Theophilus. "When I *want* the fire attended to I can ring."

"Just as you like," said Bob. "Coals are cheap enough, anyhow." It was a general observation.

"The India Office does not concern itself with the question whether fuel is cheap or dear," said Sir Theophilus MacGregor, very stiffly. He had never in his official life met with a human specimen like Mr. Robert Betteridge, and he hoped never to do so again.

Bob stopped in a picturesque attitude, with one foot in the grate, and the shovel raised in the air preparatory to being replaced in the scuttle.

"What!" he replied. "You don't mean to say the beggars—the India people, I mean—stop coals out of your salary?"

Sir Theophilus rose. It surely must be a nightmare! When would this young man take himself off? He did not intend to be insolent, it seemed, but his conduct was worse; it was without precedent in official annals. As Sir Theophilus was thinking how he could most speedily rid himself of the incubus, the incubus settled the question by himself opening the door, and, after giving a friendly farewell nod, disappearing.

Bob was somewhat discouraged; but he would try again somewhere else, he thought.

CHAPTER XVIII.

KALAMITRI'S VINEYARD.

THERE seemed to be something causing anxiety to the handsome matronly woman who stood, in a graceful costume of some light summery material, at the gate of a pretty garden in the island of Mytiline, or Lesbos, which still continues to do violence to history and tradition by belonging to the Turks. The villa to which the garden was attached was *invisible from the road*; a winding path starting from the gar-

den gate evidently led to the front door, but was soon lost to sight in a maze of olive and orange trees, of mimosas whose stems were laden with clematis wreaths and trailing passion-flowers ; while fuchsias and roses made a thick and beautiful border. It was an April day, and the sun was shining rather too hotly ; but the lady at the gate did not heed the state of the weather, or the peeps of blue sea visible through the bushes. She was looking down the dusty road, in the direction of Castro, the chief town of the island, which was not a mile distant.

Plainly she was expecting somebody who was late. As she turns her head to just notice an araba drawn by two milk-white bullocks which is passing, you can see that her face is not of Greek or Turkish type. Neither is the rounded form, the bluish eyes and healthy pink complexion of the cheeks ; these all speak of the native of another island, in northern seas. People who had known Mrs. Vane fifteen years before, in her little house at Finchley, would without any difficulty have recognized that excellent woman, transplanted as she was to southern shores, and though time had somewhat altered her.

Suddenly she puts her hand up to shade her eyes. She has caught sight of a flutter of white at a distant bend of the long road. In a minute she is sure what the flutter of white is, and herself waves a handkerchief excitedly. At once the anxious look passes from her face, and she stoops to pick a few flowers ; then she comes back to the gate, in time to welcome two girls, who have just arrived in high spirits. They too are dressed in light gauzy materials, and one, the younger, carries a parasol which she swings round her head to greet her mother.

"You truants ! Where *have* you been ? There's Mestra in fits about the lunch ; her fricassee is all spoilt, she declares. And you said you were coming back by one, and now it is half-past two."

"We have had lunch, mother dear," says the elder daughter, whose appearance is more sedate than that of her younger sister. Neither of them, however, look very matronly yet. Mildred Vane cannot be more than nineteen, and Netta barely sixteen ; yet they are grown-up young ladies, in their own estimation, and in that of all the Mytilineans who know the two tall English girls, and put down their grace and beauty to the effects of a sojourn in their southern clime. How can

any beautiful women come out of London fog? It is curious how that superstition about English people living in a perpetual vapor bath has spread even down to the Grecian Archipelago.

"Had lunch! And where?" asked Mrs. Vane, in surprise, knowing the extremely small circle of eligible friends to be found in Castro, and firmly convinced that nothing would induce the two girls ever to have a meal, unattended, at the second-rate *café* which called itself a "Parisian Restaurant" in Bergama Street. If Janet—whom everybody called Netta—the younger, had been alone, the fact that she had lunched abroad would have horrified Mrs. Vane. Netta was so flighty, so headstrong! But as Mildred had been with her—well, she supposed it was all right. Mildred was a replica of her mother. "What a beautiful girl Madam Vane must have been!" said the Greek ladies, when they saw Mildred. And she had some of her mother's moral qualities as well. It was she who managed the domestic economy of the suburban villa on the shores of the Adramyttian Gulf. She could be depended on; that was her great virtue in Mrs. Vane's eyes. She could be thoroughly depended on not to do anything rash or out of the way.

It may be mentioned here that during the long interval since our last glimpse of the Vane household many things had happened. The "berth" so kindly found by Dr. Maturin for Colonel Vane at Athens was one which the colonel gradually got to like unreservedly. He stayed for eight years in Athens, and probably would never have emigrated thence to the island of Sappho, but for Mrs. Vane. The latter did not choose Lesbos for its associations with the memory of that gifted and herotic poetess, you may be sure; but domestic griefs had come to them in Athens, not to be warded off by any clearness of atmosphere or beauty of scenery. The Vane family, as we knew it at Finchley, consisted of one boy and four girls. There were two less now. Two of the girls, Marian and Lucy, were sleeping the dreamless sleep in the Protestant cemetery near the ruined temple of Theseus; they came in age between Mildred and Netta, and their deaths were due to the malaria consequent on an extremely hot summer and damp autumn. Fearing for her other children, Mrs. Vane had almost compelled the colonel to accept the offer of an exchange of posts with the British consul at Castro, in *Mytiline*; for *Mytiline* has the deserved fame of being one of the

very healthiest places in the Eastern seas. To the colonel the change had been a sad "come-down ;" better, he thought, far better to be vice-consul at Athens than consul at Castro. For here there was no English club, no English colony, no scandal, no polo, and no delightful feeling of being in a European capital, a recognized—though inferior—centre of civilization.

If anything could have reconciled him to his present position, it certainly would have been his physical surroundings. Nowhere on the face of the globe can a more perfect climate be found than at Mytiline, and no villa was more pleasantly situated than that occupied by the Vanes. It was on a promontory of land, which sloped down from the terraces in front of the house to the blue waves of the almost land-locked Gulf of Adramytti. The promontory was called Kalamitri's Vineyard, not because many vines actually grew there at present, but because it had once been owned by a Greek of that name, and it is a Turkish habit to call any sort of garden or pleasance a vineyard, where even a small number of grape-trees grow. By assiduous cultivation those seven years had turned a wilderness into a paradise blooming with every sort of flower and fruit, and in obscure portions of the demesne the homely English vegetables flourished as well as they could possibly do at Finchley. Then the white house itself, with its wide balcony and green venetians, its lovely lawn with a border of roses, fuchsias, and orange trees, backed by groups of chestnuts, beeches, and olives, and, to crown all, the superb view away to snow-capped Ida and the plain of Troy, —all would have seemed a region of enchantment to anybody who did not hanker after the fleshpots of Piccadilly and the social comforts of the City of the Violet Crown.

"Have you been with your father at the office?"

"No, mother. We went to it on our way to the pier, but he was not there."

"And where in the name of wonder *did* you lunch, then?"

Mrs. Vane came back to her original question.

"Oh, we've been with Mr. Thesmophorus! Such fun!" Nettie answered promptly for herself.

"Netta would go," said Mildred, in answer to her mother's questioning look; "she's a favorite of his. He asked us in to see his fountain, and then he would make us stay to lunch. Not half enough to eat, you know; a Lesbian meal of biscuits, potted meats, and fruit, and some of that old Lesbian wine—oh, horrid!" At the mere remembrance Mildred

made a wry face, and her sister broke into a merry ringing laugh.

"And there were gold-fish in the fountain, mother; and it's in the entrance hall; and the sides are all marble, and Mr. Thesmophorus says we can go and look at them whenever we want—and *feed them!*"

"I don't so much mind your accepting his invitation, as there were two of you," Mrs. Vane commented; "but you should have let me know I was not to expect you. Netta, child, how you rattle on! What is this about you being a 'favorite' of Mr. Thesmophorus?"

"I am not a favorite of his. He is a favorite of mine, Milly means. I hate being patronized. I like patronizing other people, if anything of that sort has to be done, mother."

"You certainly do patronize *Greeks*. You are half a Greek yourself, Netta," said her sister, laughingly. "Some day you will be sacrificing yourself to save the Greek fleet, like Iphigeneia."

"That was a story Mr. Thesmophorus told us, mother dear. I don't think there is any Greek fleet nowadays. It would have been nice to have been christened Iphigeneia," she added contemplatively. Netta, who herself, as we have seen, had been christened Janet, but whom her mother preferred to call by her pet name, twined her arm into her mother's arm, and the three set off slowly along the path to the house. As soon as they came in sight of it, the front door was flung wide open, and a girl, obviously and essentially a true Hellene, rushed out to meet them. Her face was flushed, but she had not forgotten to don a becoming bonnet. Her first panting words were—

"Oh, come in, Meeses! The lunch it waits for you—waits ever so long."

"Why, Aganippe! where on earth did you get that bonnet from?" exclaimed Mildred.

"From Paris! Oh, she's gone and sent to Paris for it," laughed Netta, in transports.

Even Mrs. Vane could not help smiling at the spectacle of the blushing Greek girl, who would insist on wearing French dresses, and hideous modern bustles, rather than keep to the classical and becoming costume of her race.

"Aganippe did try a 'mitra' and a flowing skirt, only *Phocion* laughed at her, and then she discarded it," Mrs.

Vane explained. Phocion was the man-servant of the establishment.

"Run in now, Aganippe. As you have saved us some lunch, we must reward you by trying to eat it," said Mildred. But Aganippe still delayed. "Oh! and your bonnet looks very nice; it suits you beautifully."

Then, but not till then, the Greek maid turned and ran indoors, perfectly satisfied. Her object was accomplished. All the morning she had been planning how she could find a decent excuse for running into the open air to meet her young mistresses, so as to show off her latest fashionable acquisition; she had succeeded, and had gained a favorable verdict. Human (female) nature is very much the same off the shores of Asia Minor and on the pavements of Paris and London. Aganippe's relapse into bonnets and bustles afforded a good deal of merriment to the two sisters as they sat at their meal in the pleasantly shaded morning room of the house, which looked out on distant meadows and upland pastures, sloping gradually till they were lost in the blue haze of the Lesbian hills.

That afternoon the great weekly event was to happen. The Austrian Lloyd's steamer was to call, bringing letters, books, newspapers, parcels, sometimes visitors and tourists—in fact, all that made Lesbian life keep touch with Western civilization. And Colonel Vane, who had now returned home, and who was looking remarkably hale and evergreen even under the enforced trials of exile, set out with his two daughters to the pier, where the "rank and fashion" of the island congregated on such occasions.

The Vane family were expecting an interesting communication from England, too, on that day—nothing less than a long letter from Willy. Mrs. Vane's only boy had been educated in England, and spent his holidays in Greece. He had disappointed the colonel's expectation that he would turn out a nincompoop. He had rejected all civil professions, and had entered the army. Just now he was with his regiment at Aldershot, having recently joined it. It was only natural to hope that he would send a letter brimful of delightful martial gossip. This added an unusual zest to the anticipation with which the coming of the steamer was awaited. Not that it could actually touch at the pier or anywhere else. There are splendid harbors in Lesbos, but silted up; and

who would expect Turks, or, for the matter of that, Greeks either, to do the necessary dredging work ?

The colonel, in fact, was engaged in confounding the laziness of the authorities all the way down to the sea-shore.

"I've been at 'em ever since I set foot on this wretched island"—Mytiline was always a wretched island to the colonel—"about it, but there's that glorious harbor of Kalonia still useless; I suppose the Lloyd's steamers will have to anchor off there in the roadstead till Doomsday, or till the Russians or English or somebody take the place. The sooner the better!" remarked the colonel, savagely.

"Father, you're forgetting Greek nationality. The Greeks must have this island some day, Mr. Thesmophorus says," Netta observed.

"Hang Thesmophorus! Hang Greek nationality!"

Further outrageous remarks by the colonel were cut short by the fact that they had arrived at the entrance to the pier, and that one or two people of their acquaintance were coming up to greet them. One was the English merchant, Mr. Robson, who had a warehouse on the island, and shipped produce to Constantinople and other ports; with him and his buxom wife and middle-aged daughters the colonel was a favorite. A new arrival at the island, whom the Vanes had already met, was Professor Macneil, who had been apparently, like meaner mortals, drawn by curiosity down to the pier, and who was deputed by some learned society in England to carry on investigations in antiquities on the Ilian plain. He and Mildred were soon walking on in advance, attempting to discuss some historical or antiquarian point; while Mrs. Robson took possession of the colonel, and Netta was left to talk to Mr. Robson and his daughters, and in the intervals of attending to their very uninteresting conversation to wonder vaguely what the faces of the various Turkish women they passed, covered up in yashmaks, might be like when fully revealed to view. At last they reached the end of the promenade, and halted. The air blew softly from the shore, laden with the mingled scent of Scio jasmine, sweet-briar, and orange-blossom. In front lay the darkly blue waves of the Gulf; part of the range of distant hills was now obscured by the long black line of smoke issuing from the funnel of the great steamer, which was slowly advancing to the point opposite the town where it would drop anchor. Already the

great lighters were on their way from the harbor to the ship; a crowd of little boats was also dancing about the bay, waiting till they could dart up to the side of the steamer and take friends ashore, or carry passengers to the deck, or convey loads of merchandise, letters, and so on, to the Mytilineans. The funniest point, to English eyes, was the fact that the native Greek ladies assembled on the pier were all arrayed in the most startling displays of costumery, their arms and half their bosoms quite bare, and in every way giving the appearance of being dressed for a ball. Often as Mildred and Netta had witnessed this sight, it never ceased to have a grotesque and comic aspect in their eyes.

"How exquisitely that rock in the bay comes out in the afternoon light!" Netta said to one of the Robson young ladies. "It is perfectly barren, you know; nothing grows there. We've often sailed round and round it. But now it's lighted up with those delicate rose and golden tints, and that tender gray—and oh, how I wish I could paint it just as it is now! don't you?"

"We don't sketch," said the elder of the Miss Robsons, rather coldly.

"Oh, don't you?" said Netta. "Well, it's a great loss—to yourselves, I mean." She had no intention of being sarcastic. "I must join papa, and see who it is he's got hold of. Some strange lady."

Netta was not sorry for the excuse for breaking away from "the Robson lot," as she called them in private.

The person Colonel Vane was talking to had just come on shore from the steamer. She was an elderly lady, of determined countenance and vivacious manners.

"Such a country!" she was saying, in a loud, piping voice. "At Pera there was an earthquake. Then the noises—oh, the noises of Constantinople! I could not sleep a wink. There was a storm on the Sea of Marmora, too. And now I have come ashore here, and you tell me there isn't a hotel in the place! I wish I had gone on to Smyrna, and so I should, only they said we might be quarantined, and I couldn't stand that, you know."

"And so you're on your way to Alexandria?" said the colonel, pleasantly.

"I was," said the lady, sharply, "but I'm not now. I'm on my way to a hotel, if I could find one."

"There isn't a decent hotel nearer than Constantinople,

my dear Lady Cathcart ; but if you will accept the shelter of my roof, we shall all be delighted to welcome you."

The determined-looking lady put up a gold-rimmed eyeglass, and scanned the colonel's intelligent visage.

"Do you mean it?"

Colonel Vane assured her he did.

"Then I will, and thank you. Nicodemus, hi! I had a servant called Nicodemus at Pera, and the name sticks in my head, it's so queer. Here, follow this gentleman; he will show you where the boxes are to be taken." And after giving this peremptory order to the hamal who was wheeling her two large trunks on a barrow, without the slightest hesitation she took Colonel Vane's arm, and expressed her willingness to be shown her new abode.

The colonel, always hospitable, had been taken at his word. He had no wish to back out of the invitation, and he thought that perhaps Lady Cathcart would make herself agreeable to his wife. Before he left the pier, he had introduced her to his daughters; he had also had thrust into his hand a packet, consisting of his budget of news and letters brought by the steamer. He reserved these for perusal when he got home.

Lady Cathcart did make herself agreeable to Mrs. Vane. She admired Mrs. Vane's two girls immensely, openly, and quite unreservedly. She did not mind telling their mother in their presence what she thought of their appearance.

"The youngest especially—a perfect beauty! Take care of her, my dear madam; she looks delicate. When she goes to London she'll be greatly run after. I am a judge of beauty, and I know what I'm talking about. She is sure to be run after, and be a reigning beauty, as they call it."

Netta herself was sent out of the room on some transparent excuse. Mrs. Vane had a prejudice against her being praised to her face. It is not to be supposed that the mother did not know how pretty her daughters were—especially the youngest. There was a deep blue in the eyes, and a tint about the crown of golden hair that surmounted her forehead and fell off in long curls behind the ears, which was the despair of colorists. The chin certainly was too delicately rounded to look decided; but this weakness of lower jaw was compensated for by the rather dome-like forehead; and the complexion was lovely.

At dinner that evening, Lady Cathcart gave a racy account of her recent experiences of Eastern travel.

"You know my husband is Resident, or something of that kind, at Cairo. I know every inch of the Mediterranean, so I thought I would go overland to Constantinople, and so down to Alexandria that way. But that Orient Express! Commend me to it for a marvel of unpunctuality. Would you believe it? we were actually a *whole day late* in getting to Varna. And our steamer was nearly wrecked in the Black Sea. And the dirt and dogs of Constantinople! Do you know Constantinople, Colonel Vane?"

Colonel Vane said he had never been there in his life.

"Like Benares—only worse. The colonel and I were great allies in India, Mrs. Vane."

"By the way, my dear," the colonel presently said to his wife, "I have a piece of news for you. A letter from Maturin, Dr. Maturin, by to-day's mail. He is ill, and taking an Eastern trip. He says he'll very likely come on here and see us."

Before Mrs. Vane could express her opinion of this announcement, Mildred had exclaimed—

"Is he an Englishman? He must be by his name. How delightful!"

"Write—oh, do write at once, papa, and tell him to be sure to come and stay for a long time!" chimed in her sister.

The colonel laughed.

"What do you two girls know of Maturin?"

"Nothing at all; but we don't see too many Englishmen here," Mildred replied.

"Is he young? Is he handsome? *Who* is he, papa?" asked Netta.

"Well, he's a doctor, and a member of Parliament, if you want to know."

"I didn't know doctors could be members. Aren't clergymen, and doctors, and—and—butchers excluded?" Netta inquired, with a vague remembrance of something she had heard once about English law.

Lady Cathcart had put up her eyeglass to look at the girls as they chattered. She now turned to her host.

"Do you mean Dr. Hartas Maturin? I know him very well."

"Do you really?" said the colonel.

"Yes. Why, he was Under-Secretary, or something of that sort, in the last Ministry; the one that gave my husband his appointment at Cairo. A most accomplished, pleas-

ant man. He's one of those men who don't seem to take it for granted that a woman's only subjects of conversation are herself, her family, and the last new play. A most intellectual man!"

"Does he seem to have aged much?" Mrs. Vane asked. She could not repress her curiosity.

"I really don't know what his age may be," said Lady Cathcart, rather coldly and indirectly. "About forty, I should think."

"Mamma, tell us all about him. *Who* is this mysterious Maturin? Hartas, too. What an extraordinary name! Heartless Hartas! I want to see him. I hope he will come. Mother, who is he?" Netta insisted on knowing.

Considerable experience had taught Mrs. Vane a great deal of the art of eluding inconvenient questions. She did not wish her children to hear more about Dr. Maturin than could be helped. At the same time, there was no harm in saying that he was an old English acquaintance of Colonel Vane's, or in replying to further queries by a general statement that he was supposed to be rich; many people liked him, she believed; oh no, not at all young now, and so on, till inquisitiveness was satisfied.

By that time Colonel Vane and Lady Cathcart had got off the subject of Maturin, and were resuscitating old Indian experiences.

"No, I never could stand Poonah," the colonel was saying.

"There's no hill station near—nothing to be compared to the Nilgerries or Ooty, I mean."

"Look at Mahabaleshwar!" said Lady Cathcart, in a tone of triumphant remonstrance, as if the mere mention of the place *must* silence her interlocutor. "Look at Mahabaleshwar!" she repeated, still more triumphantly.

The colonel stopped in his work of carving a Levant hen, and looked at Mahabaleshwar. Apparently he did not see much in it.

"There's no railway up there, I think; or, at least, there wasn't when I was out there. I remember going up once in the rainy season, in a dâk palanquin, and we got stuck in a nullah and half drowned. We did indeed."

"Oh, if you mind being half drowned in a nullah, of course you *wouldn't* like Mahabaleshwar," Lady Cathcart acquiesced.

And so the pleasant meal went on; the hum of the insects

came in through the open windows, and the splash of the sea on the beach. Now, it was certainly not without a feeling of ill-defined uneasiness that Mrs. Vane had heard of Dr. Maturin's Eastern tour and the probability of his coming to Mytiline. She had never, even with the lapse of years, overcome the impression which his wife's death in the flower of her youth had made upon her mind. Time softens all things, and it had softened the bitterness of Mrs. Vane's feelings and the rigor of her suspicions; still, there was at the bottom of her soul a solid sediment of dislike to Dr. Maturin, although she was ready to acknowledge that perhaps, in the first sorrow for Janet Maturin's loss, she might, and Uncle George might, have judged him too harshly. Mrs. Vane was doubly charitable to-day, having had the letter she desired from her son.

It was remarkable that all the time of their absence from England neither she nor her husband had ever renewed their conversation about the reasons which had induced Maturin to find a foreign appointment for Colonel Vane. Occasionally the colonel heard of, or from, his M.P. friend; and at such periods he told his wife the news, although he did not think it necessary to inform her that he had gradually repaid the too obliging doctor what he had borrowed from him. There seemed to be a tacit understanding between them calmly to ignore the clever doctor and politician as a factor in their fate. The children had never heard that it was he who had given their father his position, or rather had been the conduit through which that position had been bestowed on him; indeed, they had probably never even heard Dr. Maturin's name. The colonel had for so long talked of his vice-consulship as a sop given by a parsimonious Government in lieu of the reward really due for splendid military services, that he had come to believe in that theory himself; and Mrs. Vane had her own reasons for not wishing to stir up unpleasant memories. It was by a judicious forgetfulness, by "not referring to subjects," that she had made her married life a complete and notable success.

Here, however, was Dr. Maturin actually intending to break up the "ancient peace" in which they lived by intruding his unwelcome presence into their midst! It was a disagreeable prospect, and Mrs. Vane cordially trusted that the danger cloud would pass by. Dr. Maturin might not come to Castro, after all; he might be so enchanted with

of silvery laughter. The doctor saw that she was pretty, but not with the regular features or dark complexion of Greek girls.

The other figures in the group were a maiden, rather darker and also handsome, and a lady of matronly appearance. One or two books and newspapers were spread about. It looked like the scene which is so common in the summer life of English country houses, except that here the grass was burnt rather brown, and the sea and sky both looked a clearer blue than is usual in northern latitudes.

"By Jove!" softly exclaimed Dr. Maturin, "this is not Vane's family, surely. Those girls—I wonder who the deuce *they* are? The elder one would do for Hebe, and the younger is a study for Venus Anadyomene. No doubt, Vane *is* in luck."

He advanced, and instead of going to the front door of the house, he boldly walked across the grass, raised his hat, and said—

"I think this is Colonel Vane's house? Mrs. Vane—I am sure I am not mistaken. I am Dr. Maturin; I fear I shall hardly be recognized."

Now, Mrs. Vane, if the truth must be said, had been looking forward with dread to this moment. But after the first shock of surprise she faced the situation nobly.

"Yes, I *do* remember you, quite well. But it is a long time since we met. Why did you not say you were coming? The colonel is out at present. Aganippe"—the Greek housemaid had at that moment just emerged from the front door with no better object in view than to see what her mistresses were doing—"run in and fetch a chair."

Aganippe obeyed with alacrity, having caught sight of the stranger on the lawn, and glad of an opportunity of nearer inspection.

"You have just come in time for our afternoon tea. We keep up the English custom, though everybody—that is, every Greek and Turk in Mytiline—think us mad. This is Netta, my youngest daughter; and this is Mildred. I dare say you won't recollect them."

The suave and very self-possessed Englishman bowed courteously to the ladies.

"You make me older than I am, Mrs. Vane. I should not certainly recognize these young ladies at first sight, but *they must have been* in existence before you left England

And once seen, who could wholly forget them?" Dr. Maturin smiled, and, taking the chair Aganippe had brought out, sat down. Mildred and Netta thought him rather impudent, but undeniably handsome.

"They were mere children then, of course," said Mrs. Vane, hastily. "But where is your luggage? Not left in charge of Artemidorus at the pier? He is—well, not exactly a rascal, but——"

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Netta. "Artemidorus a rascal! Dear old Artemidorus! Mr. Thesmophorus respects him highly. He says he has the antique Greek profile."

"And the modern Greek morality. I suppose you told him to send your boxes up at once, and they are locked all right?" asked Mrs. Vane, rather absently. She was wondering how the doctor had preserved his youthful appearance.

Afternoon tea was now brought out by Aganippe, whom Dr. Maturin insisted on mistaking for a Belgravian handmaid, thereby causing laughter and remonstrances from the girls, who did not find him at all as formidable as they had always supposed a member of Parliament to be. The talk was lively, but Mrs. Vane felt a relief when she saw her husband's tall form through the mimosa bushes, and Dr. Maturin had risen up and shaken hands with him cordially. Apart from the memories of the past, Dr. Maturin, she saw, was still Dr. Maturin—a man whom she never could like, and for whom she felt a certain degree of undefinable suspicion.

The greeting which Colonel Vane bestowed on Dr. Maturin was faultlessly friendly. As is usual when two men meet after a severance of long years, the doctor and the colonel looked in each other's faces, to see how much change time had effected; of the two Dr. Maturin certainly came off best from the comparison. His age, the colonel knew, must be about forty, but there was nothing to show that it was more than thirty. Whereas the colonel himself was decidedly grizzled as to his locks, and crow-footed as to his countenance; at the same time bearing himself as erect as ever, and giving the general impression of a fine, well-preserved elderly Englishman. Dr. Maturin's type was more that of the sleek diplomat, the capable man of affairs, of any age you like, and as few scruples or prejudices on any subject as possible.

Dr. Maturin had intended to be a little distant to his *protégés*—so he regarded the Vanes. But his intention

seemed to have melted away, for he allowed the colonel and Mrs. Vane to take him round the pretty estate, and point out all the finest peeps of the sea and distant coast-line with the utmost amiability.

At dinner one of the first questions that the English visitor put to his host was whether he found the consulship work very engrossing. The colonel wished to goodness Dr. Maturin would not get on to "shop." His family believed that the duties he performed were not only of great value, but of tremendous difficulty; he did not want anybody to come asking questions which might unsettle that belief; it showed bad taste, he thought.

"Oh, pretty well. Enough to keep one going."

"Two to four; that sort of thing, eh?"

"Well, no; not exactly two to four. Try some of this Lesbian. You'll find it less tart than the ordinary wine of the island."

"Thanks. I never taste new vintages. What's your average number of commercial cases per year?"

Colonel Vane felt that he was in for it, and inwardly cursed Maturin's untimely curiosity. He wondered if this were the result of getting into Parliament, and being made an Under-Secretary.

"I forget the exact number of English subjects who required my consular assistance last year," he began. "The trade of the island is considerable. I am perpetually being asked for assistance in disputes between British traders, or telegraph officials, and Greek and Turkish merchants, and others."

"They don't all take their disputes into the local court, eh?"

"No, they certainly don't. Some do. I am often asked to arbitrate."

"Ah, yes! Ten arbitrations a year, now?"

"I don't know about ten exactly."

"Say, three or four?"

The colonel felt himself cornered, and would probably have confessed to the smaller number, but for a timely diversion. Mildred had apparently been privately signalled to by her younger sister, and both girls now broke into a laugh, which Mildred at once explained by saying—

"Netta reminded me of something Lady Cathcart asked."

"What was that?" the colonel inquired, with evident relief at the interruption.

"Well," replied Milly, rather blushing, "she asked exactly the same sort of questions as Dr. Maturin. She wanted to know about your duties as consul. She asked me and Netta, when we were taking her round the vineyard, the morning she went away."

"I hope you didn't enlighten her curiosity," said the colonel, who was glad of an opportunity of showing Maturin that he disliked being cross-examined at his own table.

Dr. Maturin, however, was quite impervious to hints, if he had any particular object in view, which he had not at present.

"Lady Cathcart?" he said inquiringly. "Let me see——"

"Wife of the British Resident at Cairo; she stopped with us on her way to Alexandria the other day," explained the colonel, with some importance.

"Ah, yes," said the doctor, "to be sure. I've met her. A very masculine female. Wife of poor old Sir Digby—a regular stick, but as well out of the way at Cairo as anywhere else."

Now, Lady Cathcart had left the belief behind her that her husband was a very great man indeed. Netta was listening eagerly to Dr. Maturin's remarks. So, in a somewhat less obvious way, was Mildred. Both young ladies were inclined to be a good deal impressed by the fact that their father's guest was a member of the English Parliament, and an "Under-Secretary of State," or ex-Under-Secretary, whatever that mysterious official title might imply. And now to hear the great Lady Cathcart's great husband denominated an "old stick" by the man whom she had praised so much!

Presently the talk drifted on to a discussion of Greece and the Greeks. Dr. Maturin called them a fine race. Colonel Vane thought they were unconscionable rogues. Mrs. Vane said she had heard the Byronic craze for Greek freedom, etc., had died out altogether in England.

"I think more highly of the Greeks than most people do, Mrs. Vane."

"I hope you won't tell the girls that they are a fine race. Netta is quite ready enough to believe it without. And, excuse me for saying so, but really it's not true."

"The old dragon!" thought Dr. Maturin. He said aloud, "I think you misjudge them, in this way. What is their fault? It's lying. I admit it; they *are* clever, out-and-out,

unconscionable liars. So are all weak races that have been under an oppressive foreign despotism for long. The Turks have vitiated Greek morality. Deceit is part of their defensive armor. It is a weapon all oppressed peoples take to at once. If you come to consider it philosophically, a good deal of our English habit of truth-telling is due to our institutions; we are the only people in Europe that have neither been invaded or oppressed for eight centuries; and we are about the only one that rigidly adheres to truth-telling."

"I never *have* considered the question philosophically," Mrs. Vane replied, with as decided a streak of contempt in her voice as she cared to show to a friend of her husband's, whose past relations with him were of a dubious character; "I only judge from what we see every day around us. Colonel Vane knows about the commercial trickery. My experience comes more from servants and other people one has to do with. At the same time, I am willing to admit they have the makings of a fine people—physically and mentally, but not morally."

Dr. Maturin began to respect Mrs. Vane's powers of argument. As dessert was on the table, and the servants out of the room, he asked Mrs. Vane if her experiences in the domestic line had been very disastrous?

"Mildred can tell you about them better than I can."

"Oh, but I don't know what Dr. Maturin wants to know."

"Any instances of picturesque dishonesty on the part of Greek servants." Dr. Maturin's request was made with a smile, in his politest House of Commons style. Unlike official question-answerers in that House, Mildred went at once to the point.

"There was Calliope. She was housemaid. We got her from over beyond Antissa, and we thought she would be an acquisition to the house. She said that she loved us all dearly; but we found that she loved our dresses more, and some of our jewelry disappeared, and then Calliope disappeared too. We could hear nothing of her in her own village; but six months afterwards she brought us back our dresses, very much soiled, and one or two trinkets. She had borrowed them, she explained, to captivate the heart of her Jason; but now she was married, and did not want them any more. Then there was papa's coachman, Phormio. One day we drove a long round, and, coming back, we had got

near home, when we suddenly missed him. He had slipped off the back of the carriage without saying anything, and had left us for good; we found afterwards that we had passed through his native village, and the temptation to desert was too strong. That was not so bad, only he ought not to have forged his character when he came. They think nothing of that."

"Thanks, Miss Vane. Your catalogue of crimes is too much to argue against. Servants, however, are a nuisance everywhere. Deceitfulness is, as I said, a product of oppression. Here in Lesbos—Mytiline, I mean—I can't forget I am where Pittacus lived, one of the noblest patriots that ever breathed. Where is our European dictator that lays down absolute power after grasping it for ten years? Cromwell and the two Napoleons made themselves kings. There is no civic virtue like that of ancient Greeks. And there must be modern Greeks like them—if we knew where to search for them."

Netta thought of Mr. Thesmophorus, and looked with grateful eyes at Dr. Maturin.

"Of course, you visited the Leonidas memorial when you lived at Athens, Vane?"

"Eh? Leonidas?" replied Colonel Vane, hastily. He had not listened very attentively to the preceding conversation. "I knew a man of that name at Patras. A rascally fig-dealer. Perhaps you mean him?"

All at the table laughed.

"Papa does not care for old Greek history. He wanted to have an advertisement of the polo matches pasted up in the Parthenon, but the authorities wouldn't let him," remarked Mildred.

"The girls will take you about the island to-morrow—show you the lions, Maturin. You can get as much antiquities as you want then."

"I shall remember the promise, and take advantage of it," said Dr. Maturin, politely.

In the cool, delicious evening, they strolled about under the veranda, and along the nearest garden paths, and watched the distant lights in the harbor.

"Do you agree with your sister in her disbelief in Greek character?" asked Dr. Maturin of Netta Vane, when they happened to be walking together.

"No; I believe in the Greeks. And I was glad to hear

you standing up for them," she answered frankly. "I do it myself, but the majority is always against me here."

"I should be glad to go into the lobby, as we House of Commons people say, behind you and help to swell the number of your humble supporters," Dr. Maturin answered softly.

And Netta did not seem displeased at his flattery. She had no reason to dislike him like her mother; she did not even know of her mother's feeling towards him. It was a novel situation to have a handsome, distinguished Englishman, offering to "go into the lobby behind her"—whatever that might signify—and she could hardly help being favorably impressed with him.

CHAPTER XX.

EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY TACTICS.

IF familiarity breeds contempt, it is also true that it breeds callousness of danger. Mrs. Vane, excellent mother, began, as we saw, by being mistrustful of Dr. Maturin. For the first two days of his sojourn in the house she took care, by means of various feminine artifices, that he should not have too much conversation with her daughters in her absence. She also listened attentively to the tone, even more than the matter, of the talk passing between Dr. Maturin and her husband. She allowed "the girls" to show their visitor the ruined Genoese tower which hangs frowningly over the harbor, and one or two more local lions; but was careful, on the first occasion, to form part of the inspecting company herself, and next time persuaded her husband to act as escort. It is difficult, however, to keep up a rigid surveillance of a man who makes himself charmingly agreeable, who assents to every proposition made, who shows the greatest deference to the wishes of his hostess, and who generally comports himself like an innocent English gentleman on his travels, as Dr. Maturin did. The doctor, in fact, was laying himself out to charm and fascinate Mrs. Vane; nobody could do so better, and as he thought he saw in her manner that her fear of him *was more on her daughters' account than her own*, he was *astute enough to show the young ladies, during the first few*

days of his stay in the house, just so much polite attention as was necessary, and no more.

Fifteen years ago his present hostess believed him to be a murderer. The interval had not absolutely removed the belief, but had turned it into no more than a general suspicion; and after a day or two spent in Dr. Maturin's company, she found herself secretly wondering *why* she and Uncle George had ever formed that terrible idea—how it could be possible for this gentlemanly, pleasant-spoken British legislator to be anything half so horrible as she had once fancied. She had no doubt that he and her husband had gambled together a long time ago; otherwise how could he have got into Dr. Maturin's debt—a debt long ago paid off, as her husband assured her? So it came about that Mrs. Vane, after a few days transferred her watchfulness to the colonel's intercourse with their guest. She did not now fear about the girls—Dr. Maturin did not seem to care about their society; but she knew the colonel was easily led, and possibly he might again allow himself to succumb to Dr. Maturin's influence in money matters. She would—and she did—keep a stern eye on the colonel's proceedings; she did not allow him to sit long over the wine in the evening, and always made an excuse for cutting short his social chats with Maturin when the family had retired to rest about ten o'clock.

"Where are you bound for to-day, Maturin?" the colonel asked at breakfast, three or four mornings after the guest's arrival.

"I am willing to go anywhere, or do anything. By-the-by, have you ever been over to the plain of Troy?"

"The girls have, I think; not I. My duties, you know. I can't always get away for a holiday when I want to."

Dr. Maturin laughed rather irreverently.

"It must be an interesting site," he said.

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt," acquiesced the colonel. "More interesting, though, when the twenty years' siege was going on than now, I expect."

"Ten years' siege, wasn't it?" Dr. Maturin politely put in.

"Ah! it's all the same," the colonel answered, with grand indifference to chronological accuracy. "Well, we must take you there some day, if you stay long enough; but it's too far for a small boat, and the steamers go irregularly—only about once a fortnight,"

"Shall we all go to Skopelo?" suggested Netta.

"Can't see what there is to admire in Skopelo," the colonel growled. "Nothing happened there, did it?"

"The only thing that papa knows about Mytiline," Mildred remarked, "is that there was a person called Sappho who lived here, and we have had to find out her history from books."

"Oh, yes, he knows more than that," the younger sister corrected. "He knows about Arion and the dolphin; but then, that's because of the coins we pick up with dolphins on them."

Colonel Vane said, "You see, Maturin, what it is to have daughters. Even when one does know a thing, they won't allow that it's a merit."

Dr. Maturin asked Mildred if she ever heard Orpheus' lyre playing among the rocks.

"Orpheus' lyre!" both the girls exclaimed.

"Yes," said Dr. Maturin, who had got Mytiline up in guide-books before arriving. "I remember reading about the legend in my college days. When Orpheus was drowned in Greece, his body and his lyre together are said to have floated down stream to the sea, and then to have been carried over to the Lesbian shore—this shore. Both were buried together, and it was the old story that, while Orpheus' own voice could now and then be heard uttering oracles, the sounds of his lyre constantly rang out among the Lesbian rocks and hills, compelling the trees to come and listen just as in the days when he was alive."

"What a beautiful legend!" said Netta, in tones of sincere admiration.

"Well, shall it be Skopelo?" Mrs. Vane asked. She disapproved on principal of her girls hearing any more tales from Greek mythology. "Dr. Maturin would be sure to enjoy the place. It's only six miles off, and the view of Bergama and the opposite coast is wonderful; and there is a ruined temple."

Mildred reminded her mother that Aganippe counted on their both staying at home that morning, to superintend household matters.

"There are the hot springs. They are nearer, and the day does look rather threatening."

Finally, it was decided that only Netta and the colonel should chaperone Dr. Maturin that morning, and that the

hot springs should be the point aimed for. To tell the truth, Mrs. Vane had been inclined to imagine that if there were any danger at all in Dr. Maturin's association with her daughters, Mildred, being the nearest to womanhood, was the one to be guarded. Netta, to her mother's imagination, was still a child. In most matters, she knew, Mildred could take care of herself; but love-making would be a new experience. So Mrs. Vane felt really relieved to see how perfectly resigned her elder daughter was to staying at home that day. She was all the more willing to give her maternal sanction to the projected expedition.

Very soon the "araba" was at the door, and the three passengers passed through the porch, festooned with clematis and scarlet pomegranate blossoms, and mounted up the small wooden ladder, seating themselves on raised cushions in the vehicle. Netta always felt delighted to be taking a journey behind those beautiful solemn-looking bullocks, led by an equally solemn-looking Turk armed with a goad, and to admire the great twisted poles which rose like horns from the yoke, ornamented as they were with strings of dancing scarlet tassels. She always laughed when the attendant Turk pulled one long horn to guide the bullocks to left or right.

"We can't possibly go through the town; we should have to go by Stalimene Street, which reeks of onions. We must make a slight *détour*," quoth the colonel. "Onions are the universal dish," he remarked to Dr. Maturin, as they jogged along. "You've noticed it, of course. There's a tombstone in the Greek graveyard on which it says of a man, 'He never ate onions;' it was considered a miraculous abstention, and so had to form part of his epitaph."

The day was hot, and the great hood of the carriage was welcome. In an hour and a half they had arrived at the rocky defile, where the springs were located. One or two peasants' huts were scattered near, and Dr. Maturin was interested to see the natives actually cooking their food in saucepans in the hot water that bubbled from the ground. The hill country was beautiful, and the groves of cypress, terebinth, and mastic all around justified Mytiline's fame as the most wooded of the Ægean isles. They lunched beneath a gigantic cypress, in view of the distant sea. But first they had to pay a visit of duty to the ruined temple which Mrs. Vane had promised them. There was not much of it left standing—"more ruin than temple," as Colonel Vane said;

but it was curious how much more Dr. Maturin seemed to know about it than did either of his companions, who had been here so often. In the chat which followed on the old Hellenic Aphrodite worship, Sappho's name was, of course, mentioned once or twice by the preternaturally learned doctor.

"Let's see," the colonel remarked. His legs were stretched out comfortably on the mossy turf beneath the cypress shade, and he was occasionally trying the liquid contents of the luncheon-basket thoughtfully provided by his wife. "Let's see"—giving a wave of his hand towards the placid sea and a distant cape—"Sappho, now. Didn't she—er—commit suicide somewhere over there, Maturin?"

"Oh no. It was at Leucas, in Greece. But the whole story is supposed to be mythical."

"That's a comfort," the colonel remarked. He would have been pleased to dismiss every classical story to the convenient region of myth.

"Alcæus seems to me a much more interesting character than Sappho," Dr. Maturin observed presently. "They must have known each other. Probably Alcæus belonged to the literary society which Sappho presided over, any number of hundreds of years before the Christian era."

"Oh, do tell us about Alcæus!" Netta exclaimed. "I have forgotten all about him."

"I have also forgotten most of the facts about him, Miss Netta. He was a lyrical poet. He was not much of a man apparently, as he ran away in battle with the Athenians."

"Oh, but *that's* not interesting! Sappho would not have run away, would she?" said Netta, remonstratingly.

"I don't know. Poetical natures are rarely plucky. But Alcæus was an aristocrat of the aristocrats. He probably was in full sympathy with the old oligarchy of the Penthalids, who used to waylay their enemies in the streets and bludgeon them. Then he was exiled, and amused himself by writing calumnious verses against Pittacus, the patriotic dictator who had got rid of him and his aristocratic friends. I remember, a year or two ago," Dr. Maturin went on, "somebody in the House quoted an old law of Pittacus, imposing double fines on offences committed when the offenders were drunk."

"Was Pittacus a teetotaler?" Colonel Vane asked, with a *show of taking an interest in the subject.*

Netta glanced at Dr. Maturin's face, and the doctor caught her looking, and both laughed.

"Probably he was—of that period."

The colonel had not heard the answer. It had occurred to him that now, his wife being away would be a fitting opportunity to give Maturin a gentle hint on the subject of his desire to get employment in England, or somewhere nearer the joys of a civilized capital.

"There's no chance of a fellow distinguishing himself here, Maturin ; that's the worst," he remarked, changing the subject violently.

"It's a delightful climate."

"One can't live on climate. There's no scope for one's talents. Now, if I could get an appointment nearer home—of any sort—I should be glad to leave these regions altogether. I feel I'm rusting."

Netta looked a little surprised.

"Oh, I should be sorry to leave Castro," she murmured.

Dr. Maturin said nothing. He knew perfectly well that Colonel Vane was "asking for more." Before he came to Castro he might have been completely indifferent as to whether Colonel Vane rusted away altogether and for ever in the Greek Archipelago ; now he began to feel it just possible that perhaps, in the future, he might, for reasons of his own, desire that the Vane family should migrate to London.

"Who's that shouting and gesticulating over there ?" he suddenly asked.

The colonel looked in the direction in which Dr. Maturin pointed. "By Jove ! it's Callisthenes, shouting to *me*. What can he want ? He's the messenger we keep down at the Consulate," he explained.

Meanwhile Callisthenes, a youth with baggy red knickerbockers and tasselled turban, had climbed to the lunch-place, and deposited in the colonel's hand a note. He then retired a little distance with a low bow. The colonel read the letter, and read it over again to make sure of its contents.

"What a bore ! I am afraid I must go back at once," he said. "Two confounded Englishmen have run their ships together in the harbor, and are now threatening to run their fists into each other on dry land. Of course, they choose to do it on the most inconvenient day. I might go for half a *year without being called away from a picnic like this*. That

is," the colonel added hastily, feeling that he had let the cat out of the bag rather inconsiderately, "these disputes don't *very often* happen, but when they do, I must be there."

Callisthenes was dismissed with the message that the colonel would be in Castro within an hour, and the araba was got hurriedly ready. There was no help for it. The remaining antiquities must be left to another time. Dr. Maturin did not seem particularly vexed at the break-up of the day's programme.

On the way back it was impossible to get much more pace out of the bullocks, and some time elapsed before the old wall of the town was reached. Then the colonel stepped briskly down.

"By-the-by," he said, "*you'll* have to take Dr. Maturin back, Netta. I don't want to bring either of you through the piggish streets. It's only a mile or so on to the Vineyard."

Dr. Maturin expressed his perfect content to be escorted home by Netta, the bullocks, and the Turkish driver. Netta felt a proud though rather bashful sense of responsibility. She did not every day have an Under-Secretary and a pleasant English gentleman placed under her charge. She determined to make the most of the occasion, and boast of her achievement afterwards to Milly, in private.

"We must just stop at the entrance of the Place of Tombs, if you don't mind, Dr. Maturin. You haven't seen it yet, and you'll be going soon. There's one inscription I want to show you ever so much."

The bullocks were halted accordingly just beyond the spot where Colonel Vane had left them, and Dr. Maturin, escorted by Netta, who was laughing and chattering gayly, was led through an avenue to a Turkish and Greek cemetery. They soon reached one stone, whose letters appeared to be differently formed from most of the others; they were all turned inwards.

"Do you know the meaning of *that*, Dr. Maturin?"

"No, I do not, Miss Vane."

"They always make inscriptions so on the graves of people who have been killed 'by superior authority.' The man—you see the name—was a poor, disgraced grand vizier, who came to Smyrna to be exiled, and one day a Turkish vessel called for him, and, after a great feast on board, he was strangled and *his* body buried here. It was the sultan's orders—the *wretch*?"

"Very wicked indeed," Dr. Maturin assented. "Still, it must be a blessing for 'superior authority' to feel that it *can* get rid of an inconvenient person so quietly and quickly. Parliamentary government does not allow of such methods. The Athenians made rather a mistake when they gave themselves up so entirely to democratic institutions; they require a perfect president, or dictator, or 'Æsumnete' like Pittacus, to make them work well. But they were sensible too. They did not allow fellow like Aristides to bother them; they banished him, and they killed Socrates. There was a healthy heathenism about them, after all."

Netta looked surprised, and a little pained.

"But you don't mean that you admire them for this heathenism, Dr. Maturin?" she said, after a little pause.

"Yes. They believed in beauty, making life joyous; not in morality, like the cold northern races. They thought pain and absence of joy the greatest of all evils. I like them for it; I sympathize with that view of life entirely." Dr. Maturin's materialism was not altogether the outcome of argument; it was a growth also of his personal qualities.

"But is it not better," Netta asked, after another pause, and blushing slightly at her own boldness, "to bear every kind of pain rather than have a stain on one's character—to be wicked, I mean?"

"Possibly," Dr. Maturin replied coldly. "It is the general view in Protestant countries; a result of the climate."

They began to stroll back towards the waiting araba. Netta quickened her steps, for the sky was darkening over towards the west, and she feared rain. The doctor's words had disquieted her; yet she felt it might be impertinent in her to protest against his doctrine.

However, as they neared the end of the avenue leading out on to the road, she felt impelled to say—

"The Greeks—some of them—knew about morality, did not they? Socrates was a forerunner of Christ, almost, I thought; and there were men who were seekers after God, even in those old heathen times, were there not? I think——" She stopped, and then went on hurriedly, "You will excuse what I say, but I think the old Greek civilization, as far as I have read of it, must have been very base and wicked compared with what it might have been—compared with what Christianity would make it now."

Dr. Maturin did not attempt to argue the point. It was

one of his habits, his creeds, never to argue with women. Argument of any kind and with anybody he would rather avoid, because to defend his own views implied that he thought them always right, which was not the case. He did not maintain that his opinions were morally correct ; that was not the point of view which he adopted with regard to them ; he only knew that they *were* his views, and that was enough sanction for him.

"I have no doubt you are right," he said. "The old Greeks were not faultless, and might have been improved."

"Still, you think they were healthy heathens," Netta persisted, wondering at her own temerity.

Dr. Maturin wondered too. He did not think this beautiful, merry-hearted girl had so much sense, so much wit.

"I should be glad to believe the contrary, if you would teach me." His reply was in those soft, sweet tones which he thought went down with women.

"I don't want you to believe anything, unless it's true," Netta said. She was disappointed at his eluding argument by a compliment.

As they mounted into the "araba," a few raindrops began to patter down on the awning, and the driver used goad and whip freely to make the bullocks move fast.

"Ah, that's a splendid bit!" Dr. Maturin suddenly exclaimed. "That gleam of light showing up the battlement. Look!"

The red gleam of the sunset, shooting from under the cloud that covered the whole arch of the sky, just then illuminated in a striking way a portion of the castle walls, while the sea behind, untouched by the ray, looked dark and threatening.

"I am making a collection of photographs of the East. I must take one of that Genoese castle," said the doctor, enthusiastically.

"Oh yes! that would be nice. To take home to your—to your family," Netta ended hesitatingly, afraid she had made a mistake. She was sure of it when Dr. Maturin turned his fine eyes on her face, and said—

"I have no family. Did you not know?"

"Oh, I ought not to have spoken!" she said penitently. "Pray forgive me! I have never been told anything about you." Netta was evidently distressed at her blunder.

"Your mother did not tell you, then, that I am not married—that I have no wife?" he asked.

"No, Dr. Maturin. It was a gratuitous mistake of mine. I ought not to have said anything."

"Why not? My history is very simple. I married when I was twenty years old, a wife younger than myself, and we had no children. My wife is dead."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" Netta was doubly remorseful to have stirred up such sad memories.

"It was sixteen years ago that she died," Dr. Maturin observed. The elements seemed in sympathy with the gloom that sounded in his voice, with the sorrow which he thought it advisable to indicate by turning away his head for a few moments, and gazing at the distant landscape. Netta, he knew, could not see his eyes. There, was not much sorrow discernible there, but a defiant look rather. Yes, he acknowledged to himself, that had been somewhat of a mistake, the unfortunate incident of his wife's death. As a social and political economist, he did not approve of wasting a crime; he now believed he could have won his way to the front even without a lavish expenditure of his wife's money.

"Nobody, my dear Miss Vane," he presently said, as he turned his face towards her again, "can tell what it is to lose a home. For sixteen years I have been practically homeless."

Dr. Maturin knew that a little schoolgirl—in his cynical moments he thought of stately Netta as a schoolgirl—was not likely to be proof against his words, and the tone of melancholy in which they were uttered. They could not but make a strong impression on any nature susceptible of womanly pity. What could Netta do but murmur the feeling of sympathy which welled up into her soul and flooded her eyes? And as Dr. Maturin went on, in low gentle tones, to talk of the lonely life of a man circumstanced like himself, of the need he felt of greater companionship than could be got from the world of politics and society in London, a dangerous sentiment of pity made him seem to Netta doubly interesting. She was even quite surprised when the Vineyard gates were reached, and amid the pelting of the storm, which had now greatly increased in force, the drenched "araba" drew up to the door of the villa. Dr. Maturin politely handed her out and threw a shawl lightly over her shoulders to keep off the wet. As she entered the doorway, the first person to greet her—even before Aganippe, her constant satellite—was

her mother. There was a look of inquiry in Mrs. Vane's face. Why had she come back without the colonel? Why was she alone with Dr. Maturin? The doctor saw the look, and at once said—

"We left Colonel Vane at Castro. He had pressing business. Your daughter very kindly escorted me back. I hope she will not suffer from this sudden storm."

Mrs. Vane in her own mind joined sincerely in that hope. She was vexed with Netta, with the doctor, and with circumstances generally. Why *should* the colonel get called away on business just when it was most important for him to stay and look after his daughter? Why should one of their rare thunderstorms come on just so as to throw the doctor and Netta together? It was exceedingly provoking, but it was impossible for good Mrs. Vane to be otherwise than polite to her guest. It certainly was not his fault that the floodgates of heaven had opened at the wrong time.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. VANE GROWS SUSPICIOUS.

"How long does Dr. Maturin intend to stop?"

The question was addressed that same evening by Mrs. Vane to the colonel in the privacy of their own apartments.

"He talks of going on to Smyrna, then to Cyprus and Crete, and I don't know where besides—Egypt, perhaps. He'll go in a few days; very soon, I expect."

"It will be an anxiety off my mind," Mrs. Vane said. She was really relieved to find that the too-fascinating politician did not contemplate a prolonged stay at Mytiline.

"Why so, my dear?" asked the colonel.

Mrs. Vane did not see fit to enlighten her husband on this point, and replied vaguely. She had once again transferred her suspicions, this time to Dr. Maturin's relations with their younger daughter. Was there any ground for uneasiness? she asked herself. Merely that they had been together in a bullock-cart for a mile, in the daytime, and in full hearing of a Turkish driver. There was nothing very alarming in *that*.

Nevertheless, the next day Netta was kept pretty constantly in the range of the maternal eye, and Dr. Maturin, who had made all preparation for continuing his travels on the following day, was disappointed at seeing no favorable opportunity for renewing their conversation. He was conscious of being attracted by the girl's mixture of shrewdness and guilelessness, of merriment and principle, as well as by the more obvious charm of her great personal beauty. Dr. Maturin never resisted his natural impulses unless there was some good reason, and he saw none here. Consequently he gave himself up to the current, and, when unobserved himself, watched the movements and listened to the light-hearted gayeties of the two girls with the luxurious relish of an epicure.

And he had said something that was true when he said that he felt lonely. Self-centred and egotistic as he was, the need of human affection asserted itself now and then, of human companionship constantly. Even the carnivorous animals have natural affection and domestic tenderness, and Dr. Maturin felt himself still capable of loving a wife and family if just the perfect sort of wife and family were to fall to his lot. With imperfect, especially with troublesome and self-assertive specimens, he might become impatient. The question began to float before his mental vision—Did Netta Vane answer to his idea of a possible sharer of his life and dissipator of his loneliness? There would be, he felt, a delicious piquancy in cutting her out from under the maternal batteries, as it were; Mrs. Vane's opposition would add very much to his pleasure in marrying her daughter. But he did not in the least intend to do anything in a hurry. He might take Mytiline on his way back from Egypt, if he felt disposed. He had noticed on the previous day that Netta was inclined to be a little dogmatic on religious subjects, a trifle sermonizing. That would be a reduction from her matrimonial value.

In the afternoon the two daughters set off, having nothing else to do, to meet the colonel on his way back from his Castro office. They often did this when there were no visitors at the house, and their mother had begged them to go now, on the excuse that she thought the colonel was rather tired and not feeling well, and that their meeting him might cheer him up. It always *did* cheer the colonel, and made him feel proud and happy, to see his two handsome girls coming down the dirty little narrow lane on to which he could look out while he transacted business, to escort him back homewards.

As for Dr. Maturin, Mrs. Vane thought it very probable that he would offer to accompany Mildred and her sister, and she intended to put a veto on that at once—to pretend that she wished to talk to him on some important subject, or to show him the view from the small minaret at one corner of the roof, or to detain him on some other pretext. If he saw through her motive, and detected that she did not trust him, why, she was quite independent of Dr. Maturin, and so was her husband, and perhaps on the whole it would be best.

But Dr. Maturin did not offer to chaperone the young ladies, whereat Mrs. Vane was surprised. It was he who simulated an intense interest in the subject they happened then to be discussing, and who seemed to feel it impossible to tear himself away from his hostess. The girls set out for the town, leaving the fascinating doctor engaged in paying an eloquent tribute to the virtues of the Irish nation, and also a rapt attention to what Mrs. Vane had to say on the Education question, then agitating the waves of politics.

After half an hour or so, the conversation gradually flagged. The doctor strolled to the window, and said he thought he would smoke a cigar in the garden. Mrs. Vane saw no objection to this course. Even if—a supposition she did not really entertain as likely—the guest intended to slink out and follow the girls to the town, why, they would be coming back in company with the colonel, and Netta would be safe from the dangers of a *tete-à-tete*, supposing that by chance Mildred had left her to do some shopping, as sometimes occurred.

Had she seen the eminent member of the English Parliament in his subsequent movements, she might have formed at once a better idea of his character and of the possible dangers of the position. For Dr. Maturin did not devote any undue time to his cigar and the admiration of the evening tints on Ida's distant and cloud-like veil of snow. He sauntered quietly and slowly down a grass walk leading on to the lawn, then across the lawn itself, and so on into a path bordered with oranges on one side and dwarf olives on the other. Thence he retraced his steps, crossed the lawn again, knowing that it was in view from the house, and paced up and down for a few minutes, apparently in the most blissful enjoyment of holiday laziness. One corner of the lawn, he had noticed before, was *not* in view from the windows. Having sauntered up to that shady spot, he quick-

ened his steps, struck on to a path extending towards the shore, took a sudden *détour* to the right, leapt a slight hedge, and was in the main road leading to Castro. Nobody was in sight, and he set out on a brisk walk towards the town. It would not have been worth his while to take this amount of trouble if Colonel Vane had not incidentally mentioned to him in an after-breakfast smoke that he would not be at his office that afternoon, so he knew the girls would be coming back alone. He had no wicked purpose in his head at present than to see a little more of Netta Vane without the restraining presence of her mother or father, and, if he got the opportunity, to say something to her from which she might remember him, and from which—if she were romantic, as he believed all young ladies to be—she might in his absence construct air-castles founded on the idea that he, Dr. Maturin, was in love with her. Dr. Maturin knew his own fascinations, of wealth, of position, and of person, and was not silly or self-depreciative enough to suppose that Netta Vane would not be flattered at his admiration.

As a matter of fact, both the girls were as much pleased to meet Dr. Maturin just outside the quaint old walls, ready to escort them back, as they had been previously disappointed to find that Colonel Vane himself was away from his consular premises. The talk, as they were coming slowly home in the gracious Greek evening sunlight, was very bright and sparkling; indeed, the girls had never met any man who seemed to them to combine so strikingly English manners and appearance with the quickness and alertness of brain which they had come to recognize as the characteristic of Greeks.

When they had gone half-way, Mildred said, "Dr. Maturin will be going to-morrow, Netta, and I don't believe he has seen the interior of a Greek cottage yet."

"He is quite willing to be taken to one," the doctor said politely.

So they turned aside, up a steep rocky path that looked like the bed of a mountain stream, but which was called a road, and soon arrived at a little cluster of roofs under some fine beeches. In the gardens of one or two there were men working, who saluted the English girls respectfully; for every Mytilinean—at least, all within a six-mile radius from Castro—knew them by sight.

They entered a little gate, and took a path which led

through a wilderness of stones, on which some goats were trying to find a scanty subsistence by plucking the sparse ears of coarse grass that grew where the stones allowed them. In a few minutes more they reached a white-colored, one-storied cottage, chimneyless and smokeless, which seemed deserted.

"Shall we be welcome? Do you know the inhabitants?" the doctor asked.

"Oh no! But they won't mind," Netta said.

Mildred had stopped to speak to a Greek who was looking over the wall of an adjoining garden. Her sister was more impetuous, and, reaching the door, stepped across the threshold. She turned to see if the doctor was following, and noticed a look of hesitation on his face.

"No, you won't find it clean, Dr. Maturin. It's not comfortable either. But it's picturesque."

We know of old that Dr. Maturin was very sensitive about squalor. The Greek peasant's hut was not exactly squalid; it had none of the peculiar wretchedness that seems to hang about a London slum-dwelling; at the same time, the first whiff from the interior as they crossed the threshold was not nice. The fair-haired English girl had gone in boldly, and the doctor himself could not flinch in such company.

The only living being, of the human kind, in the hut was an aged crone seated in a chair near the open window. She was knitting, or making believe to knit, and, in spite of the genial heat of the day, her old bones seemed a-tremble with cold. There was a sign of good wages being earned by some member of the family, in the array of small hams hanging from the rafters, and the cheeses made of ewe's milk, and the loaves of Indian-corn bread ranged in shelves along the wall. Then there were hens, one or two dogs, and a pig, keeping the old lady company, and apparently not at all disconcerted by the arrival of the English visitors.

"Even the animals seem afflicted with laziness in southern climates," the doctor remarked.

Mildred had now joined them, and at once began a conversation in the island patois with the crone in the corner, who chattered in a shrill, thin voice. Dr. Maturin soon stepped outside; Netta thought, in the innocence of her soul, that it would not be polite to leave him alone, and Mildred *still kept up* her talk with the Greek dame. Here, as he and *Netta stood* together, in that little stony patch of front

garden, was the opportunity which Dr. Maturin had wanted.

"*This* heathenism is *not* healthy, certainly, from a sanitary point of view," he began.

She looked at him with half a smile, and a moment afterwards said that no doubt the old lady inside was a Christian, not a heathen.

"Have you forgiven me that remark, Miss Vane?"

"I did not know there was anything to forgive."

"Oh, yes, a great deal. My life has been worldly, and no doubt my views have suffered from the contamination. I can't help admiring the civilizations which existed before our modern religion was started, or the glorious verse of such classical heathens as Alcæus or Sappho, to take local examples, can I? Remember, English boys are taught heathenism at school. Their earliest lessons are not about Sinai and Jerusalem so much as about Olympus and Athens."

"It is a great pity, then," said Netta, stoutly.

A cessation of the talk inside the hut made Dr. Maturin afraid that Mildred was coming out.

"I said I should be contented to learn better from you. I meant what I said. Would you disdain to teach me?" Dr. Maturin had lowered his voice, and was looking with an almost imploring earnestness at Netta's face, over which a blush now spread itself, as she hastily rejoined—

"Oh, you are too clever to learn anything from me!"

"Try me!" Dr. Maturin took her hand in his for one moment. The door of the hut creaked, and he let it fall. "Some day," he almost whispered, "some day you will be England; we shall meet again, and I feel that you will *not* disdain to teach me."

"Such a curious old woman!" Mildred exclaimed. "Why, dear, you look flushed! We came up the hill too fast for you, perhaps. Or was the cottage too hot?"

"I don't feel warm, only—only tired," she stammered.

"Then we must make haste home, Dr. Maturin. My mother expects me not to overtire Netta; she is not so strong as I am."

"Ah! then I wish I had not been the cause of your coming out of your way like this."

By this time Netta had recovered sufficiently from the surprise into which Dr. Maturin's words and his strange tone had thrown her to be able to protest that she was very

glad she had come, and that she could walk for miles if it were needed.

At the foot of the hill, astute Dr. Maturin suddenly remembered that he had some point about his next day's journey to inquire into at the harbor, and left the girls to proceed the short distance home by themselves. They were met at the gate by Mrs. Vane.

"Where is your father?" she asked.

Mildred explained that he had been called away to another part of the island, and was not expected back till seven or eight in the evening.

"I have been looking for Dr. Maturin. He went out into the garden for a stroll."

"Oh, we met him just now! He has gone to the harbor to ask about his steamer. We took him into a regular Greek cottage, which he had never seen before."

Mrs. Vane's suspicions returned. At the same time, the doctor did not appear to have seen much of the girls, and his excuse about wishing to learn about his steamer might, she felt, be a true one. At all events, no good could be gained by showing her daughters the state of her mind with regard to their guest, who was so soon to depart—and who would, she trusted, trouble them no more.

Dr. Maturin had been clever enough to say to Netta Vane just enough to cause her to examine into the state of her own heart, while at the same time she had had no declaration of love made to her, and did not feel at all justified in communicating the doctor's vaguely hinted interest in her either to mother or sister. No doubt it would have been awkward for her to talk to him at dinner that evening as if nothing had happened, only the doctor seemed to be as natural and self-possessed as usual, and to be in merry spirits, and to address his remarks to everybody at table, without singling out anybody in particular. He made great fun of the so-called "Wise men of Greece." Perhaps Netta would take this as an indication that he knew where to stop in his admiration of classical heathens.

"Wisdom must have been a scarce article in classical times," he said. "'Know thyself!' There's a maxim on which to found a reputation for superhuman intelligence! I've heard better and more pithy sayings in the House of Commons in one night than all the seven Greek wiseacres concocted during their whole lives."

"One of the fellows lived here, I think," Colonel Vane remarked. "At least, there's a tablet to him in the museum."

"Ah, yes. That was Pittacus," said the ready doctor, strong in his recent perusal of the guide-books. "Well, what is Pittacus called a wise man for? He said, 'Gnothi Kairon,' 'Know your opportunity'—a valuable hint, no doubt, but not an observation which would be considered very powerful nowadays."

"But did you not say before that he was a great statesman?" Mildred asked. "He may have been called a wise man for that."

"Very just, and a very clever remark. But the wise men were gentlemen who uttered strikingly sage aphorisms; they may have been statesmen too, but that didn't count."

The talk glided on, Netta occasionally joining in, though she was less lively than usual, her mother thought. Could it be at the idea of Dr. Maturin going? She did not say a word to the doctor about his meeting the girls; and so he left Mytiline in the full assurance that the girls had said nothing either, and that Mrs. Vane did not know of that little incident.

The next morning he went away, leaving pleasant memories of his visit behind. No further opportunity of talk with Netta Vane occurred, nor did he choose to make one. Good people, he knew, are most easily gulled, because they believe others to be as conscientious as themselves. And he had not the slightest doubt of Netta's goodness. He had done enough to cause her to think of him, he felt convinced, and he could on his part think of her, at his leisure, and view her at a distance, when comfortably off on his travels. Meanwhile there would be no harm in making a little more sure that she should think kindly of a wanderer. So, in saying good-bye, he also said—

"Here is a little translation of an old Greek hymn; I made it once to while away an hour. I leave it with you to show why it is I admire the old Greek philosophers. Perhaps," he added, "when you read it, Miss Vane, if you condescend to do so, you will think of the humble author and his deplorable opinions."

Netta smiled, took the little roll of paper, and said simply—

"I will certainly read it, Dr. Maturin."

Mrs. Vane had not seen the incident. Mildred did.

"Nobody can object to a hymn; hymn is a good word," mused the wily translator, as he stood on the small Lesbian pier preparatory to going on board the vessel that was to bear him southward.

Pacing the deck of the diminutive local steamer on which he embarked for Smyrna, Dr. Maturin looked back at the hills and wooded uplands of fast-dwindling Lesbos with strange feelings at his heart. *He* to wish to marry again! He enjoyed the humor of the situation as he thought of it. But the second wife, if he took her, might prove an incubus too. Anyhow she was not likely to have any inconvenient amount of money to quarrel about.

"It's good policy to leave her to think me over," he soliloquized. "If the dragon, her mother, tries to run me down, so much the better. Girls like a little disparagement of their male favorites. The colonel would jump at me for a son-in-law. She is a fine girl; would make a figure in London society; and I don't think would oppose me. And I'm taken with her—I really am taken with her. Well, if this lasts, I will contrive to see the Vane family again before long. Yes, Pittacus was quite right. 'Know your opportunity.' In other words, don't pluck your apple before it's ripe. No; but when it *is* ripe, and provided that at that period I retain my wish for apples, why, then I don't think I shall be the man to hesitate about grasping it, and firmly."

CHAPTER XXII.

M. ROBERT BETTERIDGE FINDS A PROFESSION.

AFTER his unprofitable interview with Sir Theophilus MacGregor at the India Office, Mr. Robert Betteridge for a short time ate the bread of idleness. All the learned and liberal professions seemed equally disgusting. A single repulse took the enthusiasm for "doing something" out of him; unfaith in the India Office had bred a want of faith in all occupations. But the influences that were at work in his nature to induce him to adopt some line in life were strong enough to assert themselves again after an interval. Then

it occurred to him that old Staunton—poor old Staunton, whom he had always half liked and half despised, as a good, steady, plodding old duffer with whom he could do anything, had struck out a line of his own; he was “reading with a barrister,” whatever that occupation implied. Bob decided that he would hear what the mysterious “reading” involved, in the way of hours of labor and amount of it, and, if it seemed agreeable, he would let Staunton know that even he, Bob Betteridge, who at college had been very superior to reading of any kind, was not indisposed to condescend to read with a barrister himself.

Staunton was accordingly invited over to dinner at Reigate, and in the smoking-room afterwards Bob opened the business of the evening in what he considered a particularly artful and indirect manner.

“I met Musgrave, of Queen’s, the other day. He said he was reading law down at the Temple.”

“Why, that’s where I go every day,” said Staunton.

“Is it? Well, Musgrave said it was rather fun. Not much to do, and directly you’re a barrister, he said, you go circuit, and then, I suppose, your fortune is made, isn’t it?”

“Well, I don’t know about *that*,” his friend replied significantly. “The bar is not what it was. Depends on whether you’ve solicitor relations mostly.”

Bob thought of Uncle George. Here was an objection to this particular profession he had not considered before. Why, he had sneered at lawyers once to his uncle; and now he was thinking of becoming one himself,—only not the same kind of lawyer.

“Barristers are the higher branch of the legal profession, ain’t they, Staunton?” he asked, under the influence of these sentiments.

“They think themselves so.”

“Is the reading hard?”

“Not very. It’s not like what we used to call reading at Oxford; it’s practical work all the time—bears on what goes on in the courts, you know. Then your barrister takes you with him into court, and you see a case right through from start to finish. If you’ve been reading all the documents in the case beforehand, as you do, that makes it tremendously interesting when you see the plaintiff and defendant in the witness-box and hear them examined. Why don’t *you* read with a barrister, Bob?”

"Oh, that sort of thing does all very well for some fellows," Bob began. He was himself thinking of announcing to Staunton his desire to do this very thing; but, good heaven! Staunton must not get it into his head that *he* could mould Bob's future for him. At Oxford it had been all the other way; Bob led, Staunton followed. And Staunton, we may say here, had accepted the position of Bob's satellite out of simple good nature, a feeling also that Bob was richer and more dashing, and a real liking for him. He saw now that if he wanted Bob to take to the law seriously, as he did, he must allow any suggestions to that effect to emanate from Bob himself. He therefore changed the subject to the prospects of the inter-university boat-race; from which Bob took it to the entries for the Cesarewitch, and then abruptly back again to the point from which it had deflected.

"I think I shall do what old Musgrave advised," he said.

"What's that?" asked Staunton.

"Read down at the Temple; read law."

"Why," Staunton was beginning, intending to say that that was exactly what he himself had advised. He altered his mind, laughed, and said, if Bob was thinking of that, he dared say "old Shanks" would be able to accommodate him.

"Who's old Shanks?"

"Arthur Henry Cruickshank, Esquire, Queen's Counsel. He's the man I read with, in Paper Buildings. We call him Shanks."

"I don't mind calling on him some day," Bob remarked condescendingly.

"He doesn't take every fellow, you know," Staunton observed; "only those likely to do him credit."

This was highly artful; it gave Bob the stimulus of emulation. Hang it all! he *would* call on this Q.C.; he could do him as much credit as poor old Staunton, surely.

And poor old Staunton did a friend's part by telling Mr. Cruickshank in private that Bob Betteridge, "a very good sort of fellow indeed, and clever, but lazy," was coming to call, and asking him, as a particular favor, to take Bob into the select circle of half a dozen young men whom he, the Q.C., was initiating into the mysteries of the law. Hence it came about that in the course of two months from the date of this conversation—two months spent by Bob, as "old Shanks" insisted, in getting an insight into the elements of *English jurisprudence* by the help of Blackstone—Bob was

duly installed in the pupils' room at the chambers in Paper Buildings, had paid his fee of one hundred guineas, and was puzzling over his first "statement of claim." The law, as far as he had got at present, seemed to him particularly dry and forbidding. Still, he was "doing something;" he had very few hours of work; he could shorten those hours as much as ever he liked, and go out into the Temple gardens and play lawn-tennis; and very soon he was permitted the fun of following his "coach" into court, and seeing him pulverize hostile witnesses in cross-examination.

Mr. Cruickshank, the able Q.C., was not a man who spent any superfluous time or trouble over his pupils. It was privilege enough, he seemed to think, for them to see the work that went on in his chambers, and to help in it. His chief time for lounging into the pupils' room was when the courts had risen, after four o'clock in the afternoon. Arrayed in a light shooting-coat, and smoking a short clay pipe, he used to sit on a table with his legs dangling, and chaff and joke and discuss legal points in a rough, practical way, which was very effective.

"Here, Staunton," he would say, flinging a brief at the head of the person named, "catch that. Muff! It's a running down case, and I'm for the defence. See what sort of a statement of defence you can manufacture. Stiff! Running down cases are never stiff till one gets into court; then there's enough cross-swearing to blow the roof off. Betteridge, when *are* you going to settle those interrogatories? Not done yet? Well, you're a new-comer, and I can't expect you to be as quick as these other fellows. But do polish them off sharp. When you've time from lawn-tennis, that is," he added, with a laugh.

"Curious expression, administering interrogatories," said Bob. "Sounds as if one were giving a dose."

Mr. Cruickshank having left the room, a pupil, who also was smoking like a chimney, took his pipe out to observe that "plaintiff would find 'em a dose, when old Shanks had touched 'em up a bit."

"There's a good deceit action which Shanks'll take you to, coming on in a day or two, Betteridge," remarked Staunton, "in the Queen's Bench. Not to-morrow, because the judges sit in banc to-morrow."

A cheerfully-minded pupil, only thirty, yet quite bald, hummed, "I know a banc whereto the wild Shanks goes,"

and was applauded with general laughter. He then asked Bob if he had begun to "eat his terms" yet, and Bob said that he had, at the Inner Temple, and was looking forward to Grand Day, which he supposed was the same sort of thing as a Gaudy at Oxford, only more so.

"Less so, much less so," the others chimed in. "The benchers have a high old time, but we students only get a bottle of claret extra, or some reckless extravagance of that sort.

The weeks went on, not unpleasantly, and Bob began to think that he was getting quite an insight into barristers' work. He had discovered that common law was different from equity, for one thing, and had got over his first feeling of disappointment at not being called upon to attend at the Old Bailey and listen to exciting murder-trials. He "ate his term," and found that the diet did not disagree with him. He picked up a good deal of light legal lore by chatting with the clerks in their outer room. He employed himself in making statements of claim that ought never to have been stated, and concocting awkward interrogatories that ought never to have been administered, and which, as a matter of fact, never *were* administered, as Shanks put his pen angrily through most of them, exclaiming, "Bosh!" Then Bob invited him down to Reigate to dinner, and Shanks treated him more considerably afterwards, being impressed with the splendor of Bob's home surroundings, and foreseeing an increase of commercial and City business from the connection.

Staunton, as a young man who had passed his law examination, and was about to be "called," was more advanced in the legal profession than his friend Betteridge. Bob had never "eaten dinners" when he was at Oxford, as Staunton had done; but if the latter thought that he would be permitted on that account to play the *rôle* of mentor to his volatile friend, he was much mistaken. The one thing that Bob had settled firmly in his own mind was that "Jake" must never be allowed to patronize *him*. He therefore floundered through one or two difficulties connected with his acquisition of a decent idea of rudimentary legal principles, rather than ask Staunton's aid; and in Chambers always ostentatiously requested explanations from the other pupils, which Staunton, like a sensible fellow, did not at all object to. *An infinite tolerance for the vagaries of human nature*

was one of that young gentleman's most amiable characteristics.

There were, however, occasions when this noble spirit of independence landed Bob in embarrassment. For example, he preferred not to have Staunton at his elbow when he followed Shanks into court now and then, to see a case through.

Shortly after Mr. Cruickshank's visit to Reigate, in which that eminent lawyer contrived to impress the minds of his host and hostess with the idea that Bob's chance of developing into a Lord Chancellor was rather more of a certainty than the advent of hot weather in July, Bob was taken to Guildhall in his instructor's wake to "watch a case" of fraud. As he had drawn up one or two of the preliminary documents, and had, besides, got rather interested in the facts, he felt pleased to be whisked off in a cab with Shanks to the seat of civic justice.

His learned leader—all the pupils called Shanks their leader, because it gave them a feeling of being elevated to the rank of practising barristers—had been retained on the side of the two defendants, Robinson and Ridley. Robinson was a publican, and Ridley an indefinite sort of agent for the sale of properties; he called himself, among other titles, a "public-house broker." The unfortunate plaintiff in the case knew Ridley personally, and had, in an evil moment for himself, expressed his desire to buy the good-will and fixtures of a publican's business. He had saved up a sum of about a thousand pounds, and wished to embark in a lucrative trade.

It is humanly and charitably possible, no doubt, that Mr. Ridley may have been as honest as the day, and may have advised his friend the plaintiff solely for the latter's good. It was unfortunate, however, that he counselled him to purchase at a very high price the business belonging to Mr. Robinson, in the City Road, which turned out to be anything but a satisfactory one; and when the purchaser discovered that at the very date of his purchase, when the "takings over the counter" were being represented as enough to make a man's fortune in a week, "divers judgment creditors were about to levy on the goods" of the publican, as the publican "very well knew"—to quote the actual words of the Statement of Claim—he naturally determined to bring an action for

fraud against both the individuals who had landed him in so desperately bad a bargain.

This was the case which Shanks had to fight; and feeling that it was a difficult one, and that his utmost skill would be necessary to make the defendant's conduct appear at all passable, his spirits rose proportionately.

"Stick close behind me in court, Betteridge," he said. "Our solicitor is rather an ass, and mayn't be ready with dates when I want prompting."

"Do you think you'll pull the case off?" asked Bob.

"Don't know. My private impression is that our clients are two of the greatest rogues unhung. But I may just win, if they don't make idiots of themselves in the box."

Very skilfully indeed did Shanks glide over the most questionable transactions in connection with his clients; and he was professionally delighted to observe that the opposing counsel did not seem to get so many damaging admissions out of them in cross-examination as he had expected. In the middle of the case, he turned round to Bob and whispered in his ear—

"If I had that fellow Ridley to cross-examine, I'd make him put his tail between his legs and run out of court."

As it was, the defendant Ridley was enjoying the proceedings immensely. He had elaborately adorned himself, as most witnesses do, preparatory to being called on to give his evidence, and rather flattered himself that his personal appearance would impress the jury in his favor. If they were capable of bringing in a verdict hostile to a jolly, rubicund individual, who wore rings on every finger of both hands, a flowered waistcoat, and a vermilion tie, why, British justice was indeed going to the dogs. Robinson, the ex-publican, was also plethoric, but seemed much less at his ease than Ridley; however, he affirmed, with a courage worthy of a much better cause, that his representations at the time of the sale were strictly true, and that the plaintiff could inspect his books and judge for himself, and that, as a matter of fact, he *did* inspect the books before purchasing.

"And you thought that, not being a baby, the plaintiff was quite capable of forming his own conclusions from those books?" his counsel asked.

"Just so, sir," said Robinson, feeling that that was the way to put it.

The contention on the other side was that the sale was a

plot between the two defendants, and that it was the plaintiff, rather than the business, that had been "sold." In vain did counsel insinuate that Robinson and Ridley had known each other for years, and were bosom friends. Mr. Ridley, leaned his arms comfortably on the edge of the witness-box, and lolling over towards the barristers' benches, expressed unbounded astonishment at this suggestion. *He* know Robinson intimately? Why, he had hardly every set eyes on him till he took the plaintiff there to inquire about the business, which he had seen advertised as for sale. There never was a more complete embodiment of conscious innocence than Mr. Ridley, as he stoutly denied—he did everything stoutly—any acquaintance with his co-defendant. Shanks fidgeted in his seat. He thought the defendant protested too much.

"By Jove!" Bob remarked to his leader, as they were coming out of Court at the luncheon interval, "that fellow Ridley is a cool hand!"

"Yes," calmly remarked Shanks, for whom the moral character of clients was a matter of no professional interest; "he would lie anywhere and swear anything, no doubt."

Bob took his lunch by himself, selecting a first-class restaurant in the neighborhood of Guildhall. Shortly after his arrival, a gentlemanly young man sat himself down at the same table, and, as he seemed chatty, Bob condescended to get into conversation with him. The stranger was really a very pleasant fellow, Bob thought, for he insisted on Bob sharing a bottle of champagne with him. Then it came out that he too had been in the court listening to the trial, and he asked Bob in a deferential way how he thought the verdict would go.

Bob felt bound to uphold his own side, and said he would bet there was a verdict for the defendants.

"So do I," said the strange youth, cordially. "Ridley struck me as an honest, upright, pleasant fellow, and the way in which he was badgered was a shame. Take another glass; do. No, don't refuse." And the stranger filled Bob's glass himself.

Under the influence of this midday refreshment, Bob became communicative.

"Ridley's not such a saint as you fancy," he said in a confidential tone to his companion.

"Ain't he?" said the other. "Ah! I dare say you know. You're a silk gown, I think?"

Bob was immensely flattered.

"No," he replied. "But I know something of the case. And I know that fellow Ridley is a friend of Robinson's. He's been so for years. Why, they both keep a public-house together down at Greenwich. Robinson is the fellow who keeps it, and Ridley supplies the cash."

"You don't say so? I can hardly believe that," the stranger replied, apparently deeply disappointed at hearing his favorite witness calumniated in this way.

"It's a fact," insisted Bob. "I can tell you the name of the street. I heard it from the solicitor—from good authority. It's Devonshire Street, East Greenwich."

"Ah! well, one can't believe in anybody nowadays," the other answered, and as he did so he gave a wink, which Bob thought rather sly. They strolled back together towards the court, and then the obliging stranger disappeared.

Bob took his place as before just in rear of his distinguished leader. He noticed that Shanks seemed to have been lunching well, inasmuch as he was going off into suppressed guffaws of laughter at some witticisms perpetrated by a member of the Bar who sat next to him. Bob thought how jolly it must be to be a "risen" barrister, with fame made and money pouring in from countless clients, and nothing much to do in court but chat and joke and "ballyrag" witnesses. Here, for instance, was this case, almost decided already. Shanks evidently thought it as good as won, and beamed complacently on the judge as he came into court. There was, however, a little surprise in store both for the counsel and his pupil. No sooner had the judge taken his place than the opposing barrister, who had been very busy holding a whispered consultation with his solicitor in the well of the court just beneath him, rose up and asked to be allowed to recall the defendant Ridley. There was one question which he had omitted to put to him.

The judge saw no objection, provided Mr. Cruickshank saw none, and Mr. Cruickshank, provided he had a right to re-examine, saw none either. But he did not quite understand this move of the enemy. He scented danger approaching.

Had he known what it was that was about to be revealed, he would have fought tooth and nail against his client being *subjected again* to the ordeal of the witness-box. Mr. Ridley came up, smiling, and looked round at the jury with a confi-

dent air of good fellowship. The jury, he was satisfied, had already made up their minds that he and Robinson were the incarnations of all the virtues, and a liberal lunch at a neighboring tavern had served to heighten that impression. Over several glasses of extra stout, he and his co-defendant had laughed themselves hoarse at the thought of how nicely they had "done" the plaintiff.

"You said, I think, that you and Robinson were strangers before this transaction took place?" counsel asked in a tone which he tried to make as matter-of-fact and as free from any hint of what was coming as he possibly could.

"I did, sir," responded Ridley.

"And you adhere to that statement still?"

"Why, yes—yes, of course I do," said the plethoric defendant, defiantly.

"Then, if anybody were to say that you and he were the joint-owners of another public-house, which you had held for years, they would be mistaken?"

Mr. Ridley turned blue. Shanks jumped to his feet, not knowing whether the insinuation were correct or not, but determined to defend his client to the last.

"M'lud," he exclaimed, "this is scandalous! The witness has already denied the fact suggested."

The opposing counsel calmly waved his hand, as if dismissing the irrelevant interruption. Shanks sat down.

"I quite agree with my learned friend as to its being scandalous," the plaintiff's barrister said, in a meaning tone. "But I think the scandal is on the side of the defendants. You have not answered my question, sir," he said, suddenly turning to Mr. Ridley, who stood in the witness-box, trembling, and all his self-complacency going or gone. He "did not quite follow the question," he said.

"I will put it again, and in a more direct form," counsel rejoined. "Is it, or is it not, a fact that you and Robinson have been for years, and are still, joint-owners or joint-tenants of a public-house in Devonshire Street, East Greenwich?"

"The deuce!" Bob muttered quite audibly.

Mr. Ridley, brought so painfully to the rack, did not conceal his dislike to the process of torture which now began. He tried to avoid a direct answer. He wanted to know where Devonshire Street was. Told very sternly by the judge not to beat about the bush, but to answer the learned counsel's

questions, he at last was induced to admit that there "might be" a public-house in that street, of which himself and his co-defendant might also be joint tenants. He would very gladly have treated all his past history as equally hypothetical if it could have helped him to escape from his present intolerable predicament.

"And now may I ask why you did not disclose this fact when you were asked how long you had known Robinson?" the cross-examiner relentlessly inquired.

Mr. Ridley didn't know, he was sure. He "supposed he had forgot."

"That will do, thank you."

And one of the defendants left that box a very much unhappier man than he went into it. The jury, after this revelation, naturally did not require any more evidence. Shanks assured the judge that had he known of this he would not have defended the case at all, and the judge was quite sure that Mr. Cruickshank had no knowledge whatever of the real character of his clients. A verdict for the plaintiff was recorded, with costs and instant execution, and the judge added some suggestive remarks about the necessity of checking the spread of perjury by prosecutions, observing that the two defendants left the court "deprived of a single rag of respectability."

Shanks was absolutely furious with rage when he got out of the court. He stormed at the unhappy solicitor, accusing him of having known and wilfully misled him as to the character of the two defendants. The solicitor was equally angry, and denied all knowledge of the fact which had just been revealed, with so much earnestness that Mr. Cruickshank at last began almost to believe him. Then both turned their wrath on the unknown informer through whom the fact itself had become known to the plaintiff's solicitor, thus robbing them of what appeared a short while before to be certain victory. That victory would have meant a triumph of injustice did not occur to them at all forcibly.

Bob held his peace about the engaging stranger who had lunched with him, and been so generous in helping him to wine. He hoped to goodness he would meet that stranger soon, and have an opportunity of punching his head in public for his base deception. He also fervently prayed that neither Shanks nor the solicitor would ever learn how the damning secret had leaked out. And neither of them ever did.

It must not be supposed that because Bob had thus devoted himself, with as much assiduity as he was ever likely to display over anything, to the "study and practice of the law," he had therefore forgotten his strange friend Bastian. Again and again he had been over to Holmbury, and yet never contrived to meet the man who had given a new twist to his whole life. After missing him from the accustomed hill several times, he was thinking of disobeying orders, and trying to find out his friend's cottage for himself. But he was quite sure he would not be there, or he would have come out on to the hill; and then it suddenly occurred to Bob that he might be very ill—lying alone in his hut with nobody to attend to him; dying, perhaps, from want of necessaries and nursing. The idea was appalling. It decided Bob to risk everything in finding the house, and gaining admittance, or, at least, getting a view of the interior through the windows. It would never do to go away with the haunting fear that his friend might, after all, be wanting his assistance, and unable through physical weakness to ask for it.

Bob accordingly took his pipe from his mouth, and knocked the ashes out of it by hitting the bowl against the trunk of a tree. It was a broad-based, age-scarred oak, and as Bob's glance wandered along the corrugations of the bark, he saw something white fluttering high up on the trunk. He reached his hand up to it, which he could only do by standing on tiptoe, and tore it down. It proved to be an envelope addressed "Robert Betteridge." Bob, wondering exceedingly, tore it open. Both envelope and contents were somewhat damp from exposure, but the writing inside was as plain and readable as possible. It merely said, "Meet me at the Monument on Friday, at six in the evening."

He had never seen his friend's handwriting, yet he had no doubt whatever that the letter came from him.

"It's just his height, too," he said to himself, looking up at the trunk. "What a maniac, to think I should see a letter there!"

A feeling almost of pitying disdain crossed Bob's mind, until he remembered that, after all, the letter *had* found him. Then he wondered if his friend had by any occult process foreknown that he would knock his pipe against that particular tree-trunk. Then he laughed at the thought, and looked again at the writing. "It's just like him!" said Bob, in vexation. "No dates. How on earth can I tell what Friday

he means ? It may have been hanging there for a month." He felt it. No, it did not seem wet enough to have stood many days of Holmbury Hill. "What monument does he mean, too ? There are plenty of 'em about London. Wonder if he means the real Monument, or the Albert Memorial ? No ; it would not be like him to patronize the West End. He thinks I'm there, and the City is as far westward as he condescends to come. Well, I'll be at the place, on the chance."

Bastian himself was there, too, at the appointed time, and the two met and recognized each other in spite of the pavement passengers and the rush of traffic.

"A rum place for a rendezvous, this," was Bob's first remark.

"Ah !" said Bastian, as if the idea had not struck him before. "Noisy, yes ; so it is. I practise abstracting myself from what goes on round me. You can make London a desert that way."

"You may ; I can't," Bob replied frankly.

"Come up this passage, and let us talk," said Bastian, pulling Bob into one of those quiet backwaters which exist so plentifully near the torrent of London City traffic.

"I wanted to ask you if you had found your vocation ? Bastian was looking down at Bob with those piercing eyes of his filled with the light of evident sympathy.

"I don't quite know what you call a vocation. I'm doing something, anyhow," said Bob, with conscious pride.

"Reading for the bar. I know ; Staunton told me. Is that your *métier* ?"

"My what ?"

"Your pre-appointed part in life's drama ?"

"Well, I should like your opinion about it," Bob replied candidly. "I don't care about the business myself ; at least, not the grinding at law-books and sitting in Temple chambers. But cases in court are fun sometimes."

"Fun for the litigants ?"

"No ; for Shanks, and me, and the lookers-on.

"In fact, you are inclined to dislike the most arduous part of the profession. If I were you I should continue at it, at all events for some time longer. You cannot judge about it yet. Then 'report further,' as the doctors say. On one thing I do congratulate you : you've arrived at the point of *must* ; you are on the right path, because you feel that you must do

something. Must will change to *ought* some day ; and," said Bastian, enthusiastically, warming to his subject, "the soul's power to amplify must into ought, and to conceive of duty, is like the poet's power to give life to dull facts, or the able lecturer's power to add a surpassing interest even to talk about bones and gases and clods. You have felt something of that already, I dare say ?"

Now, Bob might have felt the internal process described, but, not knowing very clearly what Bastian meant, he prudently answered that he had never attended a scientific lecture.

Bastian laughed.

"It was only an analogy. You will see what I mean some day."

"All right," said Bob. Then he added, with a touch of disappointment in his voice, "I thought you'd be glad to know I was really doing something."

"So I am. And you feel it's healthier yourself, no doubt. Go on like this. If this occupation, after a real hard-working trial of it, does not suit you, alter it. I can't give you better advice than this—to know and be *yourself*. Never mind what people think. It's better to be a coal-heaver if one is fitted for that, than a lord chancellor if one is not."

Soon after, the two strangely linked allies parted, Bob westward—he was going to a theatre, and did not dare ask Bastian to accompany him—and the philosopher himself eastward, whence most wise men come.

Obedient to the rather better impulses which had now come over his erratic nature, the young law student went on studying law like a man. He did this for two years, and then underwent his examination for a call to the Bar, and failed. Half a year later he tried again, and, to his own complete surprise, succeeded. He became an "utter barrister," purchased the expensive head-gear of the tribe, and sat diligently at the receipt of custom—namely, on the benches of the law-courts—without finding a customer. He "went circuit." attended the Bar mess regularly, got an occasional brief as a substitute, or "devil," and finally made up his mind, reluctantly but definitely, that he "hated the law." The only part which he ever really enjoyed was the criminal side. On the rare occasions when Shanks had a case on at the Old Bailey, Bob felt that he did really see work superior to the petty squabbles which made up most civil actions—something

which forced him to acknowledge that law did some good to the community, after all.

On such occasions he gathered information from all sources, out of sheer curiosity, and did not at all disdain to talk to the experienced policemen who looked after prisoners, or to the janitors of the court. He used to take back remarkable stories to the family dinner-table at Reigate. Mr. John Betteridge saw his son already appointed, in imagination, a sort of public prosecutor. He was proportionately surprised and dismayed, therefore, when one day Bob announced that he intended to "cut the Bar in England." He had heard it was much easier to get on in Indian legal circles; and he should like a voyage, and seeing new places.

So, after three years of British brieflessness, Bob went out to Bombay on board a P. and O. He arrived there late in October, and thought India delightful until the beginning of March; then he found, to his surprise, that India was very hot. He had not been prepared for this. He had secured some briefs, but what were briefs compared with the possibility of promptly evacuating a gratuitous thermal-bath? The fact that he had not to work for his living no doubt had its influence on this semi-spoiled young gentleman. However, even when turning tail and scuttling away from the "intolerable hardship of heat," he did not mean at all to live an idle, vagabond life when he returned to England. Bastian had cured him of *that* disease. He had consulted his strange friend before; he would consult him again directly he got to London.

Returned to London, Bob fell precipitately head over ears in love. Not a surprising event to happen to a young man of some twenty-seven summers. But he had to fall out of it again, as his affection was not returned. This also was a lesson, and a severe one. A year after his return from the much too sultry Orient, Robert Betteridge at length landed on his feet. He found his vocation. Through family influence, added to the fact that he was a lawyer, he received the offer of a post in the Criminal Detective Department at Scotland Yard. His father was very unwilling that he should accept it.

"You might as well become a common soldier as a common policeman," he said.

It was not, however, as a "common" policeman that Bob was fated to go through life. His post was one of supervision.

over the rank and file of constables. And he certainly took to his duties with zeal, and evinced a decided talent for his new calling. He had always had the greatest admiration for the police force, theoretically, as the solid foundation of the law. It was just what he wanted—to be able to feel that he too was actively engaged in checkmating criminals and rogues, and in safeguarding the lives and properties of her Majesty's subjects. Compared with this, what was poor old Staunton's legal quill-driving, or Shanks' professional skill in making the worse appear the better reason? As a barrister he would have had to rescue rogues from deserved punishment; as an officer of police his duties were exactly the reverse. The pay, certainly, was not great; but this was a small matter to one so rich as Bob. He had a resplendent uniform, and a fine charger. What more could his soul desire?

When Dr. Maturin was taking his tour abroad, to Athens, and Lesbos, and elsewhere, Bob Betteridge had already been ten years at his new occupation, was a recognized police "authority," and was still a bachelor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RETURN FROM BANISHMENT.

YOUNG ladies, when given presents by gentlemen whom they have no particular reason for disliking, and whom they are rather disposed to admire, are not apt to leave the gift quite unexamined. When Dr. Maturin quitted Mytiline, we saw that he gave Netta Vane a translation of a Greek hymn, done by himself, and in a week from that time she knew the verses by heart. Two were her especial favorites:—

"Oh, Heavenly Steersman, guide my homeless bark
 Into the harbor where I fain would stay!
 And from the crowd wandering in earthly dark
 Draw up my soul unto the Holy Day!

"Purge it of dross, the sacred Lamp illumine
 That shows the windings of the upward road;
 And safely past the fathomless Gulf of Gloom,
 Draw me to the divine, far-off abode."

All the verses were mellifluous, and were just the thing to please a girl with "earnest" tendencies, as the donor very well knew. If Proclus, the author, was a Greek who lived centuries after the real prime of Hellenic civilization, and who indeed was more of an Alexandrian philosopher than a Greek poet, Dr. Maturin felt sure that Netta would be none the wiser. In her little brain she would be certain to consider Proclus as a friend of Sappho, and a companion of Alcæus, and from the tone of ecstatic piety which ran through the composition she would begin to think better of the ancient Greeks altogether. At any rate, she would think better of Dr. Maturin.

Mildred wanted to see the hymn. She kept a sort of sisterly watch over Netta's proceedings, recognizing in her a flightiness and impulsiveness and consequent proneness to make ridiculous mistakes in life which she was herself sedately conscious of not sharing. An inspection showed that Dr. Maturin's legacy of verse was not at all of a demoralizing description—was rather edifying, in fact. If it had been at all doubtful in character, Mildred would have informed Mrs. Vane of the fact. As it was, that excellent lady did not come to know of the hymn incident till long afterwards.

All that Mildred did to test her sister's state of mind as regards the absent Englishman was done indirectly.

Colonel Vane, at dinner one day, started the subject of Thesmophorus, and the improvements he was carrying out in his villa—"the finest in the island." As a rich proprietor, the colonel had a distinct respect for Mr. Thesmophorus.

"You haven't seen him, girls, lately, have you?" said Mrs. Vane.

"I never saw much of him at any time," Mildred replied. "Netta used to patronize him, as she calls it, but she's given him up completely. Poor man! He's languishing—pining amid his marble halls and gold fishes."

"Nonsense, Milly. I respect Mr. Thesmophorus very much." Netta was blushing, for some unknown reason.

Colonel Vane, looking at his youngest daughter, noticed the blush, and of course attributed it, in the usual masculine style of inference where women are concerned, to the wrong cause. Thesmophorus would undoubtedly be a good "catch." *He owned half Castro, and to own anything was in the colonel's eyes a moral virtue.*

"Do you think she cares for Thesmophorus?" the colonel asked his wife in private.

"Oh, I hope not. I don't think she could. He is so much older, and not handsome. I should be horrified if she married a Greek."

"He has plenty of money, my dear."

"Greek money," Mrs. Vane sneered.

"It can easily be changed into English," the colonel retorted.

This was really a very interesting idea. It gave Colonel Vane quite a new object in life for some days. He asked Thesmophorus to lunch, and he certainly did make himself very agreeable. He could talk English, for one thing, and though he, the colonel, had no sort of sympathy with his outspoken enthusiasm for Greek nationality, he could see that Netta had. And he thought he could also see that Thesmophorus liked Netta. He began to wonder exactly what the Greek might be "worth" in drachmas.

His thoughts, however, were, after a time, violently twisted in another direction by a letter from London, with an official stamp on the envelope. Was this the result of his having asked Maturin for more? If so, Maturin had been delightfully quick about finding him an appointment. The colonel was in a high state of excitement, and took the letter out into the garden so that he could read it in private under the olives.

The letter said nothing whatever about Dr. Maturin. That was a comfort, because Colonel Vane did not at all wish his wife to know that he was indebted once again to the English doctor for whatever he got—if he *did* get anything. From the terms of the communication, the colonel himself thought it very doubtful if Maturin had, after all, had any hand in this offer—the offer to the colonel of the post of a resident magistrate in Ireland, for which "his great Indian experience and tried ability" were described as, in the eyes of the Government, exactly fitting him.

"They must have heard about me independently," thought the colonel, swelling with pride. But he would have to live in Ireland. Well, that was not so far from Piccadilly and Junior Portman as Castro was; and he could, no doubt, "pop over" to London constantly. It would be promotion in point of pay, and status, and everything. He would accept it, "like a shot," he said to himself.

In less than half an hour he had said the same to Mrs. Vane, to the girls, to everybody. The immediate effect on Netta was exhilarating; she clapped her hands and exclaimed—

“Then we shall be near Willy! How delightful!”

Mrs. Vane was not uninfluenced by the same feeling. She said quietly—

“Ireland is not Aldershot, Netta.”

It was necessary to check premature enthusiasm, and to prevent the colonel doing anything foolish in a hurry. Aganippe soon spread the news that the Strategus, as she called the colonel, had been called back to England by Queen Victoria. Before the day was out, the Greek population of Castro who knew Colonel Vane at all were firmly convinced that Queen Victoria was about to fight the Czar of Russia, and that her army was absolutely unable to take the field without the assistance of the British Consul in their own town. This seemed to give a dignity to Mytiline which partriotic Greeks had always felt that it sadly lacked.

On poor Mr. Thesmophorus the news fell like a thunder-bolt. He came to pay a special call that evening, to ask if the intelligence was correct, and pointed out the tremendous dangers to which Colonel Vane would be exposing himself by risking his person in an encounter with “those modern Centaurs, the Russian Cossacks.” Netta hoped that, when England fought, the Greeks would fight on the same side. Mr. Thesmophorus said. “Certainly, certainly!” as if he could pledge the whole Greek nationality; he was conscious of a wild inclination to dash into any fray which could give him a chance of winning admiration from the younger of the beautiful Miss Vanes. It was explained to him, with some difficulty, that there was no Anglo-Russian war impending, and that the colonel had been recalled, not to take part in any military expedition, but to look after Irish peasants.

“That also is dangerous, is it not?” he asked. “I have read something of how the Irish shoot by the light of the moon those who govern them. It is better, far better, for you to stay here, O Colonel, where you are happy, and safe, and where we all like you so much; oh, ever so much!” Mr. Thesmophorus clasped his hands together in ecstatic inability to express the extent of the liking.

“I’m afraid I must go,” said the colonel. At the same time he looked thoughtfully at Mr. Thesmophorus, and

wondered in his own mind whether he was really doing what was wisest—whether he was not throwing away an excellent chance of securing a rich son-in-law.

It was impossible to induce Mr. Thesmophorus to go home to bed until the colonel had promised to reconsider his decision, and the two girls had also accepted an invitation to go the next day and inspect his new entrance-hall and stables. The visit was paid, and, besides showing them his marble halls, Mr. Thesmophorus insisted on giving Mildred and Netta a most sumptuous collation, and singing to them a patriotic Greek ballad afterwards, which would have utterly spoiled any chance he might ever had possessed of becoming the lover of Netta Vane. Mr. Thesmophorus was a Greek, and therefore clever; but his voice was rather husky, and he himself was inclining to stoutness, and, though the sentiments of the song were admirable, they did not strike her as so poetical as the hymn left her by Dr. Maturin.

Meanwhile, at the Vineyard itself the great question of whether this English appointment should be accepted or not had been already decided in the affirmative. Mrs. Vane had a motherly anxiety to find good English husbands for her daughters; she liked, though she somewhat despised, the Greeks, and she naturally entertained a genuine horror of the possibilities of the climate, combined with insanitary surroundings, which had already robbed her of two of her darlings. She had no reason, besides, to suppose that the offer came through Dr. Maturin, or was anything else than the spontaneous acknowledgment by the Home Government of her husband's dutifulness as a consul. Mrs. Vane did not know much of the political world, and indulged the pathetic fallacy of supposing that Castro was considered a highly important centre of trade and civilization in official London circles.

She had asked the colonel how he thought he had got the appointment. He replied that he hoped it was through merit.

"Perhaps it was through Lady Cathcart," his wife replied, being far too frank to flatter.

"Cathcart! Not a bit of it."

"It could not have been through Dr. Maturin?" she hazarded, the thought suddenly striking her.

"Maturin? He hasn't got back to England yet, I expect. No; Sir Digby Cathcart is more likely than Maturin," said

the colonel, thinking that perhaps the Cathcart hypothesis might prove useful at some future time.

"You see, dear," Mrs. Vane suggested, "it does not actually appoint you in so many words. You are only 'requested to return to London to enter into consultation with Mr. Balthazar Barclay, and the other heads of the Irish Government Department, as to whether you would feel able and willing to undertake immediately the duty of a resident magistrate under the new scheme in County Kerry.' How long-winded these official things are! But is it quite *certain*, Henry?"

"Certain! Of course. The fellows would never fetch me home and play me false like that. Balthazar Barclay is the new Irish Secretary, you know."

The die was cast, and the preparations for leaving the island commenced. It would, however, have been quite unlike the colonel if he had done and said nothing more on the subject of Thesmophorus's intentions as regarded his youngest girl. He consulted his wife again on the subject, and persuaded her to sound Netta, which she did indirectly by proposing that the Greek should be invited to a farewell dinner, and asking Netta for her opinion. She opposed the idea strongly. Mrs. Vane told the colonel that "Netta hated Thesmophorus;" then the colonel tried his own experiment, by asking his daughter one morning to go with Mildred to see some fine pictures of Armenian scenery on view at the Robsons' house—"Mr. Thesmophorus, he had heard would be there, and other people they knew." The bait was rejected. She said decidedly that she did not care about the Robsons, and did not want to see any pictures.

Her feelings will be better appreciated if a certain conversation which took place on the homeward-bound steamer from Smyrna to Brindisi is here repeated.

Mildred and her sister were sitting on deck, looking over the low bulwarks, and watching the long coast of Candia flit by. One of them had been humming to herself the lines of Proclus. Both were thinking, rather regretfully, of the beautiful land they were leaving, apparently for good. They had spent happy years at Athens, perhaps even happier ones at Castro, and, whatever awaited them in England, they would never cease to remember the earthly paradise of Kalamitri's Vineyard, the golden days, the exquisite air, and *blue expanse of sea*, with the Trojan coast beyond.

Suddenly Mildred asked, "What was it made you like, I mean respect, Mr. Thesmophorus so much?"

"Because he was not ashamed of his nation. Because he believed in Greece and the Greeks."

"I believe he proposed to you, Netta?"

It was a feeler thrown out almost at random. Mildred herself was surprised at the instant result.

Netta rose from her seat.

"Yes, he *did* propose to me," she said, looking down at her sister with frank, calm eyes.

Mildred gave a little shout of triumph, because she had guessed right. But in a moment this mood turned to tender solicitude on her sister's behalf. She rose too, put her arm round her waist, and said—

"Oh, Netta! And what did you say, dear?"

"I must not tell you. I don't think it would be right; it was a sort of confidence. But, dear, I can tell you what I did *not* say. I did not tell Mr. Thesmophorus that I would marry him." There was a flush of subdued excitement on her face, but she said this decidedly.

Mildred began to respect her sister more than she had done before. This prudence was more than she would have expected. If she had examined her own thoughts, she would have found that her idea of her sister was of a girl likely to throw herself away on some disreputable lover out of some absurd romantic feeling or high-flown mistaken sense of duty, or else to say "Yes" impulsively to somebody she did not really care about, and then to repent at leisure. But here she had said "No" quite properly. She had gone through the ordeal correctly, and she had known, too, how to keep it to herself. Mildred had always recognized her sister's high sense of honor, her good principle, but she had felt less certainty as to her discretion.

It required a good deal of questioning before Netta would even tell a single word of what happened after she had dashed poor Mr. Thesmophorus's hopes of happiness to the ground by her refusal of his offer.

"Well, but," said Mildred, at last, "surely you did not leave him abruptly, poor man?"

"Oh no! I told him—though certainly it had not much to do with the question—that we were going to England very soon."

"And what did he say?"

"He said he would come too."

"And you ——"

Netta laughed. "I told him he would be sure to be seasick."

"Was he horribly offended?"

"He said —— Oh, I forget what!" After a pause—"He said he supposed I was engaged to be married to somebody else. But, of course, I denied it."

"Of course you did, dear."

Netta was pleased to receive a sisterly kiss at the end of the dialogue; it showed that Mildred, always judicious herself, approved of how she had behaved.

The girls were too excited and interested by the incidents of the train journey across Italy and France, and the sight of the northerly Europe they had hitherto never even seen, only read about, to remember much more of either Mr. Thesmophorus or anything or anybody else at Mytiline. They hardly took their eyes away from the wonderful new panorama visible through the carriage windows, except when sleep compelled them. The northern air in the waning summer seemed cold, and made them shiver in their wraps. The scenery of France, especially towards the end of their journey, seemed terribly flat after Castro. At last they reached Dover, and were enchanted to be in England and at rest for a time at a comfortable hotel.

At Dover the colonel was not so much enchanted. He received a letter at the hotel which contained news the very reverse of what he wished or expected. The letter was from Maturin. It told how the Government of the day had been defeated over some part of their policy, and were "going out;" and their Irish arrangements consequently would fall to the ground, he feared.

So it ultimately proved. It was a terrible blow to Colonel Vane's sanguine expectations. He cursed himself for his folly in throwing up his consulship so abruptly. He now saw how far better it would have been to take a month's leave of absence, and run over to England from Mytiline to make more inquiries about the proffered appointment.

He went up to town the very day after his arrival at Dover, having telegraphed, asking Maturin to join him at the Club. The Junior Portman, in the long interval since he had last seen it, appeared to the colonel to have altered *almost beyond* recognition. He would have enjoyed revisit-

ing the scenes of his (comparative) youth, if it had not been for the black shadow of this disappointment. He still hoped, however, that Maturin's influence would be able to put things right.

The two men met at the Club. Maturin was hurried; he had "important business" elsewhere. Still, he was exceedingly friendly. Yes, it *was* his influence, indubitably, which had helped to get Vane the Irish appointment. But, of course, he did not mean Vane to throw up his consulship till the other berth was certain. If he had thought there was any danger of that he would have written a word of warning. He was very glad, for all that, that Colonel Vane *had* come to England, he said, and he looked forward to renewing the acquaintance with his charming family. Were they in London yet? At Dover? Then he would hope before long to run down and pay his respects.

"By the way," said the colonel, "if you do come down, perhaps you had better not say anything to Mrs. Vane about how the appointment was given me—or offered rather."

"Why?" asked Dr. Maturin, sharply. "Is your wife still prejudiced against me?"

"Not at all, not at all. Prejudiced against *you*? Ridiculous! But you know—well, it was your doing my going out to Greece. Then if she hears it's your doing my coming back, too—well, you know, she mayn't like it; mayn't understand it, you see."

"I see. There's not the least reason for her knowing."

The remark, however, made Dr. Maturin anxious to go down to Dover as soon as possible, and observe whether any change of importance had come over Mrs. Vane's way of regarding him. The truth was that the doctor had, in the interval since he had bade farewell to the household at Castro, done what he had intended to do when he left. He had thought over the question of whether he wanted to marry, and he decided that he did. Then, was Netta Vane the sort of wife that would be satisfactory? Yes, he thought so. If he had described her, he would have said that she was very like his former wife in face and manner, but without her exasperating faults. She had more ballast. She was not silly, or obstructive, or given to prattle about home concerns, or otherwise objectionable in the old way which he had found so intolerable. Yes, on the whole, he had decided, coolly and deliberately, that, in spite of difference of age, he would

wed this young girl. He would be proud to show her beauty off in London drawing-rooms. At the age of forty, or thereabouts, he had become a lover again. He thought she admired him, and he was capable of a feeling of satisfaction at being admired by a creature like this.

When he did visit Dover he was very circumspect. He distrusted Mrs. Vane, and thought she distrusted him with regard to his relations to the younger maiden of the household. He therefore made his greeting equally cordial to all. There was no perceptible difference between his conversation to Mildred and to her sister. Mildred wondered that Dr. Maturin should have said nothing to Netta about that Greek hymn. Perhaps he had forgotten the gift. Only once when, in conversation about politics, he called the Irish "healthy barbarians," he gave a glance and a smile towards Netta. But nobody would have known that he was trying to make her understand that he still remembered the talk they once had at Mytiline. He was determined to do nothing to frighten the mother, because she could certainly retard, even if she could not altogether prevent, the successful outcome of his courtship.

He talked over the Vanes' present position in the most friendly and sympathetic way.

"I wish I could do something," he said repeatedly. "I could easily, if my party had not just been kicked out of office ignominiously. I represented the matter very strongly to the late Irish Chief Secretary, and he promised me he would see what could be done. The new Government ought to offer you something."

"So they have," said the colonel, gloomily. "I went, as you advised me, straight off to the Under-Secretary. Well, yesterday morning I had the answer. He wants me to take a lucrative post, he calls it, at Sierra Leone."

"Sierra Leone!"

"Yes. A deadly climate. Like offering a man his funeral expenses. Of course, I must refuse."

Dr. Maturin, after all, made somewhat light of the whole affair. He was cheerfully optimistic. Vane would be certain to get something, he said. He did not intend to help him to that something at present. If he succeeded in bringing the whole Vane family into his power, so much the better. Then some fine day he might win little Netta's undying *gratitude* by producing a fine appointment from his pocket.

And by keeping the matter hanging up, he should be able to have opportunities of prosecuting his love-affair. Yes, it would be certainly better that Vane should wander in the wilderness of impecuniosity for a season. But Dover was a tedious long way to come, and to come often would look suspicious. He strongly advised the family taking a good furnished house in London. Why not near himself, at Manor End ?

Mrs. Vane, however, would not hear of that. She thought they were likely to see quite enough of Dr. Maturin as it was. And though his manner to the girls was unexceptionable, yet the return to England had produced on Mrs. Vane's mind a curious effect. It seemed more natural to suspect Maturin in the country where his first wife lay buried.

After more than a month of Dover, a furnished house was found in Bayswater, and the family migrated to it late in Autumn. They would be nearer to Aldershot, too, in town ; and Willy could leave his regiment and come and see them occasionally. That was an attraction. It was a depressing day when Colonel Vane found himself once more in London, not very much better off than he was when he left it sixteen years ago. He was older—he felt that. He was a half-pay officer then ; he was a half-pay officer now.

As if fate had purposely packed a whole Pandora's boxful of misfortunes and disappointments, to be poured out on the Vane family at one time, Willy—on his first visit from the camp—disclosed the hateful fact that his regiment was just “ordered to the Cape.” Here was a new blow ! In a week after their migration to town, Mrs. Vane's only son set sail in a troopship, full of spirits, reckless of the doom which had befallen other only sons sent to the same quarter of the globe. But the spirits he had left behind him in the London lodging were simply deplorable.

The gloom now settling down on the colonel's soul harmonized with his wife's new melancholy. The afternoon that Dr. Maturin called at their London abode, he thought he was received coldly. True to his determination to do nothing precipitately, and to create no alarm or suspicion, he went away almost immediately, promising to call again before long.

“She's the dragon guarding the golden apples in the Garden of the Hesperides,” he thought to himself. “By-the-by, I must brush up my Greek lore ; I shall have oppor-

tunities presently of talking to Netta privately, and she admires the Greeks." He looked out the Hesperides in a Mythological Dictionary. He found there the interesting intelligence that the dragon's name was Ladon, and that Hercules fetched the apples as one of his "labors." He laughed when he came to the words, "This was particularly difficult, as Hercules did not know where to find them."

"It *was* something of an obstacle to his success, certainly," he soliloquized. "That's the difference between me and Hercules. I *do* know where to find the orchard, and the apples too."

Meanwhile he had succeeded in his plan to draw Colonel Vane over to England. It was a stroke of luck that Vane should be without a berth, and so dependent on him, Maturin, for favors to come. He would be a fool if he could not work such a situation to his own advantage.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE LOBBY OF THE HOUSE.

It certainly aided Dr. Maturin's plans that political exigencies forced him to leave London for a while.

For upwards of thirteen years he had represented in Parliament a division of Middlesex which included part of the Metropolis—that part in which Manor End was situated. He had gained his desire—his philanthropy and his ready tongue had secured him a constituency. But now new political arrangements had been made. He was considered by the party managers a "strong candidate," and he could no longer be spared for a safe seat. So he found himself obliged, as a penalty for his acknowledged abilities, to attack a stronghold held by the opposite party in another quarter of England.

Usually a man's chance of gaining the girl whom he loves would be very far from helped by absenting himself for some weeks. In the present case, Dr. Maturin flattered himself that he had already made a great impression on the daughter, and that the mother was the only obstacle that he had to

dread. If he had remained in town he could not have voluntarily kept himself away from the Vane's Bayswater lodgings; as it was, he was in the north of England, wooing his new would-be constituents to return him as their member, and Mrs. Vane's suspicions decreased with each day of his absence. Colonel Vane's uneasiness increased in a like ratio, because if Maturin deserted him now, after fetching him to England, where would he be?

Meanwhile the discovery that Colonel Vane had returned to this country was made by Bob Betteridge, who had not set eyes on his ancient companion for all these years. During the whole of that time Bob had registered no bet with the colonel. He had registered but few with anybody, compared with what he had been in the habit of doing before Bastian had crossed his path. Bob felt glad to think that he could see the colonel by just going up to Bayswater some afternoon. And Mrs. Vane—he remembered her as a pleasant, shrewd, lady-like woman. And they had a number of children, he recollected. He wondered languidly what had become of *them*. “Nothing I hate so much when I’m calling,” he said to himself one day as he took a cab from Scotland Yard, “as a lot of noisy children romping about one’s legs, and getting up behind one’s back and messing one’s collar.”

Bob had not sufficiently allowed for the effects of lapse of years. He spent a very jolly afternoon with the Vanes, and the colonel and Mrs. Vane both insisted on his staying to dinner. He said he had important business at “the Yard,” but he let the business go to the wall for once. Perhaps it was the pleasant feeling of being welcomed as an old friend, and finding two nice-looking young ladies instead of the brawling brats whom he had inconsiderately expected.

Before he left he knew a great deal more about Mytiline and the habits of Turks and Greeks than he had ever known before, and he had induced the whole Vane family to promise to come over to Reigate and see “his people.”

“I live at home, you know. The governor’s always trying to make me set up an establishment of my own, but it’s so comfortable down there that I don’t see the fun. And I can run up to town in half an hour.”

They had not mentioned Maturin’s name the whole day. Of course, Mrs. Vane and the colonel were aware that he was called Bob’s brother-in-law, but the former, at all events, had no reason whatever to refer to the subject, nor had the colonel

much more. Mrs. Vane had known Bob as an erratic, rackety young man when she left England. Now she saw him almost middle-aged—older, no doubt, but still fresh and young as ever in appearance, with a something added to him which told of steady application to work, and of a “settlement” having occurred in his ways and principles. She liked his appearance very much. She would be glad to go over to Reigate, she said.

“Do you know, I expected to find you both little girls that high?” Bob laughed, as he addressed Mildred and her sister indifferently. He was thinking how impossible it would be for these tall damsels to climb up behind his chair and mess his collar and back-hair.

The girls themselves found Bob charming. They had known but few Englishmen, and there was a frank openness and “abandon” about Bob’s manners which contrasted strongly with the ways of the more subtle and wily Greeks. And a visit which they all soon afterwards paid to Southwold Court served to increase this favorable impression. They liked Mrs. Betteridge, now an elderly lady, of charmingly vivacious manners still; they did not dislike Mr. Betteridge’s ponderosity and pompousness. They were amused with the way in which he yielded to his son and his son’s opinion in everything. And the house and surroundings could not but strike them as simply perfect. Mr. Staunton made one of the party at dinner. He, unlike Bob, had stuck to the law, and the law had rewarded him by giving him a good steady practice. Mildred thought that, for a man of evident cleverness, he allowed Bob to domineer over him in a manner rather surprising. But it showed that Mr. Staunton was good-natured, at any rate.

No man probably knows how heartily he despises a position until he is compulsorily ejected from it. The “pleasantest club in London” is usually represented by ex-legislators as being a kind of home for lost souls, a miserable Inferno, at whose threshold wait the “Avenging Cares,” as they did when Æneas visited the “*Lugentes Campi*” underground. Alas for Dr. Maturin’s expectations of victory at the polls! He went to the northern constituency, and he came back defeated. The electors had not “seen through him,” but they were merely disgusted with the policy he represented. They did not dismiss him because they had found out the difference between an actor and a hero, but

simply because he was not the instrument they wanted. It was a surprise and a shock to him. But he took it quite philosophically.

He had been lifted on to the benches of the House of Commons partly by a wave of popular feeling. The tide had now ebbed, and he ebbed with it. But it had been high tide for thirteen years, and there were reasons which made his defeat less bitter than it might have been.

For one thing, he knew enough of the game of politics to feel certain that his time would come again. Then, although he had achieved a political position inside the House, he was not much of a mob favorite outside. Popular audiences now and then imagined that they could see beneath his polished sentences a contempt for their opinion, and were apt to find his oratory a trifle cold and chilling. It was clear-cut like his features, over-refined like his character. It was strong, but not robustious enough for them. This knowledge had somewhat sickened him of a career which had to depend on the support of popular audiences, or which must at once end. Just now, too, circumstances had provided him with another ambition to take the place of the political while that remained dormant. He was ambitious to marry Netta Vane, and his mind concentrated itself on that object the more firmly because of his political repulse.

One day, when Bob deserted work to pay an afternoon visit to the Vanes in Bayswater, he was surprised and not at all delighted to find his clever "brother-in-law"—so he still thought of him—there before him. He had not seen much of Maturin of late years. The more, in fact, that he associated with Bastian and Staunton, the less necessity did he feel for cultivating the friendship of Dr. Maturin. They were not in the least unfriendly when they did happen to meet. Only their lines lay apart; and since Janet Maturin's death, and the doctor's engrossing Parliamentary occupations, his visits to Reigate had been few and far between. He had heard from Mrs. Betteridge of Bob's mysterious friend Bastian, and that he had exerted a beneficial influence on her son's ways of living. Dr. Maturin did not in the least believe in beneficial influences generally, but he now and then wondered languidly who this fool—this friend of Bob's—might be. Some latter-day ranter probably.

The Vanes welcomed Bob with effusion, while Dr. Maturin looked on *with calm, stony eyes, and said nothing.*

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It was Mildred who received him with the words—

"You've come just at the right time. We're all going off to the House of Commons. Dr. Maturin is going to take us."

"There's a Greek debate. Just fancy!" Netta added.

Bob's countenance fell.

"I was going to ask you all to go with me to a demonstration in the Park. It'll be fun, I think. Very likely a row."

The others laughed. Bob added hastily—

"Oh, it'll be as safe as a house. Lots of police about. And it's one of the sights of London, a Hyde Park meeting."

"I'm afraid they have settled on Parliament for to-day," said Mrs. Vane. "But you'll go with them too, Bob, won't you?" She was glad of the chance of securing a male escort besides Maturin.

"I—I don't know," Bob stammered. "Hartas, do you think you could get me in anywhere?"

"I am not a member now, unfortunately," Dr. Maturin was beginning, when Bob interrupted—

"Oh, I saw about that! I was awfully sorry to see the fellows had elected somebody else. They must be idiots, those people!"

"Well those people—if you mean my old constituents—went on electing me steadily for thirteen years, so I must not abuse their intelligence," Dr. Maturin replied, with a smile. "And it was I who deserted them, not the other way. If you care to go on the chance, I've no doubt I could smuggle you into one of the galleries."

Inwardly the doctor did not at all relish the prospect of Bob's company. He should certainly have to surrender a good deal of his chance of impressing the Miss Vanes with the idea of his exclusive right to chaperone them about London. At the same time, Bob's presence might conceivably be useful in taking off Mildred, and so giving opportunity of quiet talks with her sister.

Dr. Maturin was soon deeply engaged in a corner of the drawing-room, in a conversation with Netta as to the exact nature of the dispute, about the rights of Greece to more territory, which was to be debated by Parliament that evening. On his previous visits she and Bob had always chatted and joked together, each relishing the other's freshness and good-humor. Now Bob felt Maturin as a blight on the proceedings.

He heard from Mildred that Mr. Staunton had been to call on them.

"Has he really?" said Bob, rather surprised.

"Yes. He asked mamma if he might, that nice day we had at Reigate. And he's going to take us to his chambers, and to the Church of the Temple."

"Oh, the Temple Church, you mean!"

Bob said to himself, "Hang it all! old Staunton's more cunning than I thought." Here was Maturin making up to Netta, and Staunton ingratiating himself with Mildred. Bob was conscious of a horrible feeling of old bachelorhood, and being left out in the cold. Even his own familiar friend Staunton was trying to cut him out, it seemed. He wished to goodness he had not invited Staunton to dine and meet the Vanes.

They had a very early dinner, and Dr. Maturin made himself the life and soul of the party. Nobody could tell a better story, or be more amiable and universally attractive when he liked. It may have been from malice prepense that he led the conversation on to subjects on which the less erudite Bob had a difficulty in following him.

"Which side do *you* take in the dispute?" he said, in a pause of the conversation.

"What dispute?" Bob asked.

"This Greek affair," Dr. Maturin replied.

"I did not know there was any dispute—any Greek affair," Bob admitted frankly. He felt a little discomfited when everybody laughed. In his own defence he was forced to say, "Well, you see, I've not lived in Greece for years, like all of you—Hartas excepted."

"Have you seen that eccentric individual you were telling us about, again?" Mrs. Vane asked, wishing to help Bob by changing the subject.

"Bastian? Yes. He's founding summer colonies for poor children in the country. That's his latest idea."

Dr. Maturin listened attentively.

"That's a good notion," he said.

"How's the Manor End Park getting on, Maturin, eh?" Colonel Vane put in. I've heard nothing about it since you gave it."

"What is the park?" Netta asked.

"Oh, a splendid place! Maturin gave it—gave it to the poor, years ago." The colonel was surprised that everybody

did not know of the facts. He hated the burden of explanations.

Netta turned questioningly towards the doctor, who said in the lightest possible way—

"Oh, a mere nothing! Some vacant land I had on my hands, near my house." He knew by experience that the best way to impress people with the magnitude of a gift was for the giver himself to depreciate it. "I must take you all to see it, when you honor my house with a visit. You'll see everything in London or near it in course of time," he added gayly. "I want to include Westminster Abbey to-night on the way to the House. There's an evening choral service going on."

Netta was determined to ask her father or mother more about that park afterwards. Meanwhile it increased her impression of Dr. Maturin's generosity, and his modesty as well.

The visit to the Abbey was a happy thought, suddenly occurring to the doctor. He fancied that it would give him a better chance of a quiet talk with Netta than the House of Commons would do. Nor was his expectation disappointed. After the service they strolled slowly over to "the House," Bob escorting Mildred. Dr. Maturin, walking a few yards behind with her sister, at once said—

"Have you forgotten our conversation at Mytiline? Have you forgiven me for my heathen proclivities?"

Netta laughed, and said there was nothing to forgive.

"Oh yes, a great deal. I am a backslider from Christian certainty; I feel it. I don't make the best use of my opportunities. But I am much alone, and nobody takes the trouble to convert me. If I were an African negro, or a Melanesian savage, missionaries would look me up."

"I read your hymn, and it seemed to me wonderfully Christian in tone," Netta said gently. "If you admire that, you must have the same feelings, the same ideas, and that means that you are a Christian."

"I am glad you read it. I was afraid you would forget me, and lose it—especially as you left the island so soon after I saw you."

"Yes, we did leave very suddenly," she replied, rather inconsequently.

"But you did not quite forget me?" Dr. Maturin persisted.

She looked up at his face, smiling, though a little fright-

ened. Just then they entered the swinging doors of the Hall and she felt glad when one of Dr. Maturin's member friends accosted him, and she was saved the necessity of a direct answer.

In the lobby he left the girls for one moment, to interview some official about tickets for the gallery. On his way back to them he was recognized, and a crowd of members at once gathered round him, greeting him cordially, condoling, asking questions, chaffing, and generally welcoming him back to his old haunts. Dr. Maturin had calculated on this. He had timed his first visit to the House, since his defeat, so that the Vane girls might see him the centre of a throng of friends. It was a clever stroke, and Mildred, watching in a most interested way, whispered—

"How popular he is!"

"Such a man must be," Netta answered reverentially.

Once snugly ensconced in their elevated gallery, the girls found even the charms of a debate in the British Parliament capable of wearing off with time. The subject interested them uncommonly, but the speakers did not. They none of them seemed to rise to the dignity of the occasion. And what an empty House, what a lifeless audience! A minor question of foreign politics is not a matter to throng the legislative benches. About ten o'clock the Miss Vanes went home, leaving Bob in the strangers' gallery opposite, where Dr. Maturin had put him, and being escorted to their cab by the clever doctor himself.

"I shall call to-morrow and see that you are none the worse for the terrible excitement," he said laughingly. "You must have found it awfully dull."

When the girls got home, they were full of Dr. Maturin's politeness, and his reception by all his friends.

"I wonder they don't make him Prime Minister," said Mildred; "he seems so popular."

"And what a shame he could not speak! He knows more and cares more about the Greeks than any of those stupid old fogies who prosed away," said Netta. "And he was turned out to Parliament just because he was the champion of the poor Greeks!"

Dr. Maturin had, in the course of conversation, certainly made a remark to the effect that "constituencies don't care about generosity to other nations; they want it all kept for themselves;" perhaps he expected Netta to draw an exten-

sive inference from such a statement, and to suppose that he lost his seat through devotion to oppressed nationalities.

Mrs. Vane, however, at once corrected her.

"Why, Dr. Maturin lost his election before this Greek question came up," she said.

Netta was not at all inclined to give up her point.

"I am sure that was what Dr. Maturin told us," she said.

"You must have misunderstood him, dear," said Mrs. Vane, quietly.

"Mr. Staunton told me that it was some disagreement about a railway; the people who ought to have elected him were angry because he did not persuade Parliament to give them a railway," Mildred put in, with a tone of assurance.

"Mr. Staunton! You are always quoting him," Netta answered. She was angry at having her hero misrepresented. He seemed born to be misrepresented by everybody. And she was sure that he had told her that he had lost his seat for befriending Greece.

As a set-off to this visit to the House, Bob could think of nothing better than to take the Miss Vanes to see Bastian at his East End home. He obtained the leave of that difficult being to do this. Bob thought that Bastian's powerful personality would influence the girls at least as much as Maturin's. Besides, he did not believe much in Hartas now, and he did in Bastian, and he liked the Miss Vanes to see the best specimens of Englishmen while they were about it. So he proposed this visit the next time he called at the Bayswater lodgings; and it was agreed they should go, some day.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LAY SERMON.

THE expedition of the "Vane girls" to Mr. Bastian's East End lodgings took place in company with Bob and Mr. Staunton. Neither Mildred nor Netta looked forward to the occasion very much. They were prepared to find a kind of *inferior clergyman*, a lay helper—an uninteresting being who *dogmatized* about religion without the authority of a white

tie. But as it was, their first peep at poor London, the journey down the Whitechapel Road impressed them greatly. They were astonished to compare this actual Metropolis with the flattering picture they had drawn of it at a distance.

They found that the object of their visit lived in a broad street of low houses—houses, that is, that were low in elevation, not in respectability; so that, when they were admitted into his rooms, there was far more light and a greater arc of sky visible from the windows than in the more lofty thoroughfares of the West End, where life seemed passed at the bottom of a well,—and not the well of truth generally. Unfortunately, Bastian was not at home. Bob had written apprising him of their coming, but he had left word that he had pressing business which would detain him till four in the afternoon. It was now only three. He begged that his visitors would make themselves quite at home in his absence; so the one small servant, a mere child, with clean, bright face, said.

There was nothing for it but to sit down and cultivate patience. Staunton was full of apologies for having brought the young ladies to see a gentleman who kept them waiting a whole hour.

"And it's not much of a place to make one's self at home in," he added.

Mildred at once replied, "But it *is* Mr. Bastian's home, is it not?"

"And if *he* can live in it always, we ought to be able to endure it for an hour," said Netta.

Staunton felt rebuked.

"What shall we do?" asked volatile Bob, who was regretting that smoking was impossible for two reasons—one because of the Vane girls, the other because Bastian might not wholly approve.

Mildred laughed. "We can't examine the pictures on the walls, because there are none."

"Or look at the albums, for the same reason," Netta remarked.

"I'll show you over the place," said Bob, springing up.

Netta cried. "Delightful!"

Then both girls suddenly looked grave, and said, "Can we? Would he like it?"

"Like it!" said Bob, looking rather defiantly at Staunton, as if he expected an objection, and was determined to do

something to ingratiate himself with the fair visitors; "he'd be tremendously proud and pleased." Bob felt safe in the fact that Bastian could not return for a whole hour.

Staunton did not object, perhaps for the same reason. The little party sallied out into the narrow passage, into which the still narrower steps from the story above descended like a ladder, and, turning a sharp corner, came into the diminutive kitchen. At all events, if not a kitchen, it was the room where the bright-eyed maid was busily engaged—"Singing at her work, and o'er her saucepan bending," as Staunton observed to Mildred *sotto voce*; to which Mildred replied, "Only there is no saucepan." The girl seemed surprised, but not disconcerted at the invasion. She stopped her work, and smiled. Netta asked what the room was.

"Why, the kitchen!"

"Then, where are the plates, dresser, saucepans, dishes, and—and—all the other things one sees in kitchens?"

"Yes, by Jove!" echoed Bob, "where *are* they?"

The little maid said nothing, but proudly produced a saucepan; it had been behind a door leading out into a dismal back yard.

"It doesn't look as if it had been used much," Netta told Bob, confidentially.

"It's got the dust of ages on it—and the rust too," Bob whispered in reply.

The visitors felt a natural delicacy about prying any further into the mystery of the kitchen arrangements. But the small maid-of-all-work felt that her dignity required asserting, and the evident doubts of the strangers removed by the voice of authority. So she stood up, folded her hand on her apron, which looked like a pinafore on her tiny form, and said—

"I cook *here*. And Mr. Bastian"—proudly—"praises me often. I can make tea. See!" and she stepped briskly to a little cupboard, pulled the door, and disclosed some tea-things. "And see here"—and she tapped a little iron chamber close to the fire—"this is the oven. At least, half of it is the oven; the other part is the boiler;" only she called it "borler."

The boiler had an orifice at the top, with a movable cover, and nothing would satisfy the imperious little maid but each *one of the inquisitive visitors* bending over it to see the *water inside*, which was really water, and not a mere

pretence. Like many other generals, she pushed her triumph too far, and produced a catastrophe.

"By Jove! what's that?" said Bob, peering in.

"What?" said Staunton, who happened to be nearest.

"Something black and slimy in the corner. Ugh!"

They all looked in, and tried to pierce the pitchy darkness.

"It certainly looks like a collection of twigs, or dirt, or something," said Staunton, cautiously.

A little persuasion was sufficient to induce the kitchen maiden to rake up the suspicious substances.

"These are certainly legs of things," said Bob, who first eyed the treasure-trove.

The girls looked, and felt inclined to scream.

"There's no doubt that they are parts of deceased specimens of the *Blatta orientalis*," Staunton whispered to Bob.

Then all four turned on the little girl, who could not understand what the fuss was about.

"Don't you ever wash it out?"

"No, sir. No, ma'am. No, miss."

"But this water, now, my dear," said Staunton, adopting the tone of friendly leading which he was accustomed to use with a certain class of witnesses; "your master only uses it for washing his hands, and so on? I mean, he of course does not have this water for soup, or tea, or coffee; that would come out of the kettle, eh?"

"There ain't no kittle," the little maid replied. "I get water from this borler for tea, always," she went on, not noticing the awestricken silence which had fallen on the visitors. "Mr. Bastian," she felt inspired to add, "don't care much about what he eats and drinks, he don't."

"I should think not," Bob said.

"And ~~we~~ should have had tea from the borler, too," Staunton remarked in a low and dismal voice to the two girls. Netta could not help bursting into a laugh.

Bob laughed too, from the infection.

"Now, young woman, I tell you what it is," he said cheerily. "Here's half a crown. Run out to the nearest ironmonger's, and bring in a new kettle. And a cake. I dare say Bastian hasn't got anything for us to eat, or only some stale bread and butter slices. Get a cake, then; run away. Quick, before your master comes back!"

The little maid put on an old hat doubtfully. Was it

right of her to abandon her kitchen like this—to leave it in the possession of the enemy? Well, she would go, but she would not stay away long, with such questionable and much too inquisitive visitors about. Upon her return, the ladies and gentlemen refused to leave the kitchen till they had with their own eyes seen the kettle filled from the pump, and the cake cut into slices.

"He must be a very abstemious man," Mildred observed, after they had been talking the incidents over for some time in the parlor.

"Awfully abstemious," said Bob.

"Horribly abstemious," said Netta, and shuddered.

At that moment a light step was heard on the flags outside the front door, the rattle of a key in the lock, and then a manly voice in the passage was audible asking if anybody had come. The next minute Bastian entered the room, bowed to the ladies, and shook hands cordially with Staunton, and then with Bob.

Bob, thinking a somewhat more formal introduction advisable (some men always believe in the saving efficacy of etiquette), said—

"Miss Mildred Vane—Mr. Bastian; Miss Nett——"

"I know, I know" Bastian; interrupted. "You said who was coming in your note, Betteridge. I must beg you all to forgive me for having kept you waiting. It was a duty of a pressing kind, which I could not give up. These two gentlemen will tell you"—here he addressed Mildred pointedly—"that I am not a man who can be accused of unpunctuality in keeping appointments, as a rule."

Mildred at once said they were very much obliged to Mr. Bastian for allowing them to come at all, and she hoped he had not been called away from anything to come and meet them.

"A brute of a woman," Bastian replied, quite regardless of his surroundings, or of the polite question in Mildred's remark. "She was fined three weeks ago for pawning her children's clothes for drink, and, as money is all she cares for, I hoped it would teach her a lesson. But she has broken out again, and ill-treated her boy—quite a little chap, not five years old. Doesn't this"—he turned to Staunton—"strengthen the argument for human creatures having demons, or 'elementals,' installed in their bodies, as old philosophers have believed? Some of the people I meet

about here"—he was addressing Netta now—"are mere tigers, with souls apparently undeveloped. That is a horrible condition of things—the brute faculty full-grown, the moral or spiritual part that of a baby, or worse."

"Yes," she said, in some awe of the picture drawn; "there was nobody like that at Castro."

"Castro?"

"That was in Mytiline, where I—where we all lived till a few months ago."

"Oh, a Greek island! People would say that Mytiline is less civilized than Whitechapel, because it has no railways, public-houses, or daily papers. Did you find it so?"

Netta did not quite know what to say; the direct force of this man's character rather frightened her. She took refuge in the remark that there *was* a newspaper, one or two, she thought, published in the island; and they were talking of a railway, too.

"Ah! the whole world will be a gigantic Whitechapel some day," said Bastian, "at the rate we are now going."

"This woman—this one that knocked her child about—did you have her locked up?" Bob asked, with natural professional interest.

"No, not this time. I am treating her a new way."

Netta could not help asking what the way was.

"Exorcising the devil inside her. I can't explain it to you. As a preliminary measure, I made her go into an eating-house where no liquors were sold, and have enough solid soup and other victuals to last her a day or two, because very often the drink craves proceeds from bad nourishment. Then for to-night she is sitting quietly enough, nursing and attending on her child."

"What, the one she hurt so much?" Mildred asked, rather shocked. "Is not that dangerous?"

"She's all right for to-night," Bastian replied firmly. "I defy evil to get hold of her till to-morrow, and to-morrow I shall see her again."

"You seem pretty confident," said Bob, who could not help noticing with some dismay how the girls were drinking in his words as those of an oracle.

"I *am* confident." As if wishing to change the subject, Bastian added cheerfully, "You can none of you have any idea how these poor creatures live. They don't eat enough. *They are so miserably shiftless and helpless. Their homes are*

pig-sties, very often. And if you make them a bit' decent one day, the next they will have relapsed into their primitive dirt."

"Cooking arrangements defective?" asked Bob. The question was not prompted by a desire to receive useful information, but was launched in a spirit of pure mischief, it may be feared.

"Shockingly bad," Bastian replied.

The four visitors exchanged glances. It is probable that Netta, at least, would have given outward expression to her amusement if she had not been in this man's presence. Bob was less reverent.

"Do you ever find black b——" But here Staunton nudged him so violently in the side that he turned round and said "Shut up!" rather angrily. The entrance of the little maid created a timely diversion.

The little maid was bringing in the afternoon tea. It was a study to watch her face. Evidently she wished to impart a knowledge of the surprising events which had recently taken place to her master. But how to do it? She deposited the tray on the table in the centre of the room, and lingered long over the arrangement of cups and plates, trying to catch Bastian's eye. He was talking, and hardly noticed her entrance. Then, as a final effort, she took the plate of cake—unwonted luxury—and placed it exactly in front of his elbow, which was leaning on the table-edge. Suely he *must* be startled by such a sight as that! No, it was of no use, and she was obliged to retire, blushing and half laughing, but disappointed. Just as she was disappearing out of the door, she caught Bob's eye, and the sense of the humorous being rather strong in her, she was quite unable to contain herself any longer. She slammed the door, and then could be heard in the kitchen in paroxysms of laughter. The slamming of the door had attracted Bastian's attention for a moment; but he would probably have passed it over as unimportant if he had not at the same moment happened to look at the faces of his guests one after the other. They were simply charged with hidden merriment.

"Hullo! what is it?" he said. Gradually his gaze took in the unusual preparations for a meal, and his next question was, "Who has done this?"

"We've all done it," said Staunton, boldly. "You can't blame one of us more than the others."

"I don't believe in luxurious living," he answered simply and frankly. "But I certainly should have provided something for visitors, and I am much obliged to you all for reminding me of my duty in this way. The old Greeks had a proverb"—here Mildred and Netta became abnormally attentive—"that a man is what he eats. There is nothing so deadening to any higher kind of existence as a care for particular foods. It's an acknowledgment of the supremacy of the bodily environment, which requires to be humbled in the dust and disregarded; only then do we approach to a really unselfish frame of mind when——"

"Yes. When do you have dinner?" Mildred asked suddenly, and forgetting that she was interrupting their host.

This brought Bastian down to earth. "Dinner?" he said blankly. "I think it is the same as my tea—but I'll ask Susan;" and he stepped into the kitchen, and came back with the tidings that "he dined at six, Susan says," Netta thought Mildred's interruption most ill-timed, and said eagerly—

"Then you think that we ought all to cultivate absolute unselfishness and self-forgetfulness?"

"Absolute self-forgetfulness is impossible. It is more important to make the self altogether noble and pure, so that when we do remember it it may not be a drag on us. How can creatures who depend on a bodily organism for life fail to have their thoughts and actions very greatly regulated by the requirements of that body? I go further than that, and say that the average men and women we meet get no good from trying to sacrifice and deny themselves too much. The reaction to sense is more than they can bear—as we see in the orgies of religious fanatics, in former days and sometimes in our own. I think the old calumny against the early Christians, that at their secret meetings they killed and devoured young children, arose from the fact that there was a good deal of religious excitement at these meetings, and the old Romans could not imagine religious excitement without an accompaniment of maniacal excess. They thought the ecstatic worshippers of Christ must be the same as the ecstatic worshippers of Bacchus and Isis, and do the same things. Nobody can expect—certainly I never do—that a lady of society, let us say a beautiful young girl——"

Bastian stopped, not confused, but evidently doubtful whether to go on with what he was thinking of in the

presence of his visitors. The girls had never heard anybody who talked like this, and begged him eagerly to proceed.

"Yes, it can do none of you any harm," Bastian at length said. "Well, what fatuity it is to expect a beautiful young girl, of the ordinary kind, not a being endowed like Joan of Arc, or Saint Theresa, or Elizabeth Fry, to be forever thinking of others, of mortifying herself, and renouncing the world. And when we praise self-sacrificing lives, I think we ought distinctly to acknowledge that they are only good for peculiar natures; otherwise we spread the entirely false idea that those who do *not* lead such lives are blamable. But it is absurd to call Mr. Robinson, the City clothier whose shop is at the end of this street, wicked because he does not sell all his goods to feed the poor and go into a monastery."

"Then," said Staunton, interjecting his remark rather thoughtlessly, for he had been staggered at this sudden change on Bastian's part to the argumentative standpoint of the man of the world, "you mean that everybody should try only for a moderate amount of self-denial; that too much of it does not suit the human constitution."

"That is *not* my argument," Bastian said decidedly. "Natures differ, and I was speaking, not of everybody, as you say, but of the majority. The few even now can afford to abandon the lower self, and more will do it as years go by, and great will be their reward. There is no limit to the power given by a life of resolute self-abnegation; for it, even the physical material barriers fade away, and the liberated spirit of man finds with surprise and joy that it need no longer grovel amid hopes and fears and longings, but can soar far away to communion with the Eternal Spirit, and have sure prescience of its future home."

"It is a very beautiful idea," said Netta, in a low voice, and clasping her hands together on her lap. "Is it not the same doctrine as that of our religion—when we are told to deny ourselves and take up our cross?"

"It is exactly the same truth," Bastian replied, and you will find that it lies at the basis of all religions that are worth anything. But some have seen the *consequences* which spring from this self-abnegation more than others—I mean, not the mere 'personal salvation' in the sense of an individual and exclusive safety, but the marvellous way in which the soul or spirit itself develops when planted in a *congenial soil*, of self-renunciating deeds, and the immense

power it gains over itself, over other spirits, and over the material universe—how the spiritual horizon begins to expand, and new worlds swim into our ken. It is a psychic discovery parallel to Kepler's, when he put the first telescope ever made to his eye; things hitherto concealed at once become plain."

"He has other wonderful theories," said Staunton, who felt some of the responsibility and pleasure of a showman, and who was glad to see how well and freely their host was talking. "He believes in re-incarnation."

"Oh?" said Mildred, rather doubtingly. "What is that?"

"Do let us hear, please," Netta, whose ignorance was quite equal to her sister's, more simply pleaded.

Bastian began characteristically.

"Re-incarnation is not a theory. It is a fact; yet one of which I admit that I have only gained complete assurance in the last ten years. Before that time I was dimly conscious of it, no more. I had read, of course, in Plato and other old Greek philosophers, the doctrine that knowledge is only recollection, which means that we come into the world with a soul which has already acquired stores of learning in former lives, and that when we think we are really acquiring fresh knowledge we are merely digging up the buried treasures within us. Perhaps you have never heard that Socrates tried to prove the truth of this by calling a little slave boy before him, and asking him the properties of a square—eliciting from him gradually the correct answers, and showing how his mind contained in itself, undeveloped, the power of rightly appreciating the truths of geometry. Did you read the 'Meno' at Oxford, Betteridge?"

The abrupt question somewhat disconcerted Bob.

"Eh? No; I don't recollect it, if I did."

"There are a number of other interesting facts which show how men's minds have instinctively grasped or groped after this great truth. Even savages are blessed with valuable intuitions, and sometimes have a remarkably strong belief in the pre-existence of the soul before birth, and its passage into other bodies after death. The Egyptians, who were far from being savages, had a myth of the souls of men once having belonged to fallen angels who had rebelled against the gods, and had denied their souls' divine origin. Human bodies were therefore invented for these rebellious souls to enter, where they could purify themselves during life; and

after death the celebrated judgment was passed in the Palace of Osiris, deciding whether the purification was complete. If so, the soul mounted rejoicing through the heavenly mansions to the presence of Phtah himself; but if not purified, it had to renew its mortal drudgery, entering the bodies of men or even animals."

As Bastian paused for a moment, Bob felt moved to remark that the Egyptian belief about fallen angels was like the Christian one. He always took his friend's theories, much as he respected their author, with a lawyer-like grain of salt, Netta looked approval of his remark; she was trying all through Bastian's broken discourse to reconcile these new beliefs with her old and cherished dogmas, with all the zeal of the scientific Broad Churchman, and perhaps with equal success.

"Many religions and peoples have that belief, in different forms," Bastian answered. "What was the derided Kabbala but a belief in angelic presences, almost the Platonic 'ideas' personified? And those middle-age Jews who invented it had one remarkable doctrine, at all events—they preached that Christ's soul, incarnated in flesh once more, would reappear on the earth again to bless the human beings, by whom it would once again be despised and maltreated. That is a noble and touching idea. It is all evidence of a haunting notion which has possessed our race, that the essential principle of man's nature is akin to the divine, has fallen from the divine, and can rise to it again. Do you know that it was a custom in ancient pagan times for a dying Roman to exhale his last breath into the mouth of his nearest relative? The old race of Seminoles, in Florida, used to hold a child over the face of its dying mother to receive her parting spirit. At this day the Algonquin women who wish to become mothers resort to death-beds, to receive the vital principle from the dying. It is something like the English witches' old custom of breathing their 'familiar spirits' into the mouth of their successors. Of course, it is easy to ridicule all this; and I mention it merely to show the form in which the belief in a transfer of souls presents itself in rude ages and among uncivilized races. The Romans, however, were tolerably civilized. And if you think of it, that idea of the soul being a breath is the best one we, even in our educated century, can form. The Greek word for spirit, *pneuma*, means a breath. The Holy Ghost means the Holy Breath, or the breath of hol-

ness. We think it a pardonable fancy when the German peasant opens the window or the door of a death-chamber to let the departing soul out. The same custom is very common in England and France."

"Don't you call those superstitious ideas?" Staunton ventured to ask. He had often said the same to Bastian before.

"Some of them—yes. It is the groping after truth. Yet I maintain that the most superstitious Cherokee, who believes that his magician, whom he calls 'Possessor of the Divine Fire,' can change himself into a beast, is more near truth than the educated scientific materialist of our own country. The one credits the soul with too great powers; but that is better than denying the soul's existence altogether. There are only two theories worth considering; the scientific one, which says, or hints, that the soul is a name for the power produced by the bodily machinery in motion, and dies with the body just as motion dies in a locomotive when the engine fires have gone out; add the religious doctrine, that the soul is separable, and that personality is the bodily organism with spiritual essence superadded. Round these two theories the conflicts of the future will rage. I who believe in the latter do so because I know in my own person what this spiritual power is; and every fresh proof given, by 'telepathists,' as they call themselves, and others, of the soul's power to transcend matter, should be regarded as a victory for the doctrine that the soul is not a mere resultant of what scientific people call the interaction of nerves and brain."

"I quite see that," Mildred remarked thoughtfully; "but then, spiritualists hold this kind of belief, I think, and there is a good deal of imposture about the spiritualist theories, is there not?"

"I don't think it is quite fair to ridicule spiritualism because spirits are supposed to speak through chairs and tables alone. The spiritualists themselves argue that chairs and tables are just the most obvious and convenient bits of matter present when people are sitting round, and that great discoveries are often made through contemptible means—as, for example, this discovery of galvanism might be ridiculed because Galvani made frogs' legs dance. But I," Bastian said almost fiercely, "wish to have nothing whatever to do with modern spiritualism, as it is called. Its preachers are too often gross impostors. I know nothing of the power of

souls in other worlds to bob up behind a person who is being photographed, and I am disposed to doubt it altogether. I know nothing but the one fact that the soul *is* immortal, that it does re-enter other human bodies on its road to its eternal home, and that resolute self-denial enables it to see truth, and almost to conquer surrounding matter."

"Then there is no truth in the idea that one man is more a medium than another?" Staunton again asked, more to bring out the salient points of Bastian's doctrine than because he was ignorant of them.

"I hate this cant about mediums. Depend upon it, most of them are quacks. But I do hold that to some power is given more than to others to pierce the veil and shake off the mire, and so to make matter obedient to them. I ascribe it to the fact that these are souls which have passed through a number of lives already, and who have therefore gained more purification, and are nearer the goal. But"—and here he lowered his voice, and spoke almost in a whisper, raising his finger threateningly—"all the worse for them if, being better endowed by nature than their fellows, greater participants in the divine force which moves through nature and controls it, they wilfully sell themselves to imposture, pretend to know what they do not in order to gain gold, profane the holy oracles which have once spoken in their hearts. Very soon what light they had will be extinguished; they will have to invent sophistries as to evil spirits using their tongues to speak falsehood; they will no longer be oracles, but blind leaders of the blind."

Netta rose from her seat. She felt strangely excited. She wanted to ask a personal question. Bastian seemed to divine her wish, for he said—

"If there is anything I can make plainer, I will."

'Thus encouraged, Netta said—

"Have we all lived before, do you think? Have *I* lived before?"

"Not you—*you* are a compound of soul and body; but I have no doubt your soul has lived before, like mine, like all of ours."

"But then——" Netta persisted, and stopped. After a pause, she went on, "There is nothing of all this in the Bible, is there?"

"We are only just beginning to understand what there is in the Bible," Bastian answered. "For example, who can

doubt that the words and spirit of Christ, applied as they will be in the future to politics and society, will totally transform the methods of the former, and the structure of the latter? But I think you mistake in supposing that Christianity is opposed to the doctrine of an infinite number of soul-lives."

"I did not say 'opposed,'" Netta remarked rather anxiously. "Of course, I know nothing about the matter. I only asked."

"In My Father's house are many mansions," Bastian said, solemnly and reverently. To him the words were evidently the expression of a great truth, for he repeated them again. "How can we rationally expect that the same mansion will do for Socrates and a bargee? And don't you see that if there are compartments in the next world, as that text implies, spiritual progression after death is not, as you might think, unscriptural. And of course there are numerous instances in the Bible of spirits being 'raised,' as it is called. Remember the witch of Endor summoning the spirit of the dead Samuel. Remember how the spirit of Elias was reincarnated in that of the Baptist. The power of exorcism, the possession of a 'spirit of divination,' is not spoken of in Scripture as an imposter, but as a reality, capable of being misused in wicked hands. The Bible insists on the value of holiness—'What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'—and my doctrine fortifies that Christian theory, because it shows that the soul is of such infinite worth that it is not allowed to sink into hopeless, cureless sin, but that, even if myriads of ages are needed to effect its purification, those ages will be given it, and the purification shall happen in the end. See how merciful my doctrine makes God to appear, and contrast it with the cruelty of what is often mistaken for Christianity! That theory represents the Deity as able and willing to interfere to prevent a soul going to perdition, and declining to do so. But we reject that wholly and entirely, as a ghastly mockery of justice, and for the first time the mercy of God is proved, and the ways of God are justified to man, and a tremendous load is taken off the hearts of believers. For, depend upon it, whatever the orthodox may say, it is fearfully hard for our human souls to reconcile themselves to the idea of an eternity of punishment for twenty, thirty, or even seventy years of moral wrong-doing on *this planet*. No doctrine drives men into infidelity like

this. It goes dead against the revelation of the Deity which is within us; it does violence to inherent morality, and distorts every moral judgment that religious men form. Oh! try to believe, with me, that the clever theologians have misinterpreted the books they profess to know so much about, and that God is much more merciful than any priest has ever dreamed, and does not create a thing so beautiful, so noble, so priceless as the spirit or moral part of man just to throw it away again like a spoiled toy after a misspent lifetime. In the infinite number of worlds around us there must be places where broken battered souls are mended. Don't think that it is for nothing that the world is becoming year by year more merciful itself. That too is a revelation from the Supreme, a hint dropped from heaven, that after all perhaps we may have misread some of the teachings in our Bible, and not taken enough pains to notice where our interpretations of the Book conflict with the equally certain revelation in our own hearts. Therefore, don't try and prove the theory of spirit progress and reincarnation to be unscriptural; if you notice, very little of definite information is imparted to us as to the next world, and that mostly in metaphor. And, after all," Bastian ended, with a sigh, "texts can be made to prove anything."

"It's rum so few swells—Bishops, now—have taken up with this idea," said Bob, wishing to make himself as agreeable as the circumstances would allow

Bastian smiled slightly.

"The doctrine," he replied, "is not one which at present is likely to have a majority in its favor. No popular orator need fancy that, after explaining to an audience how to purify the soul and escape from the mire of sense, he will 'sit down amid loud cheering,' which is what that class of men live for. What you say seems to imply that the general judgment, at all events of educated people, is rarely wrong; but I think you confuse between practical and philosophical questions. There is no doubt that ordinary common sense, as it is called, is quite capable of deciding about ordinary subjects, such as whether it is best to live under a despotism or a democracy, whether the stomach or the brain is the nobler organ, how many hours of daily labor is sufficient for a human being, and so on. But take the mass of men into the region of metaphysical reasoning, and they wander like *wayfarers in a fog*, stretching out their hands blindly hither

and thither, if by chance they may light upon some familiar landmark. Before we submit to a popular vote the future destiny of the soul, or its origin and essence, we must first convert the people to a belief that they have souls at all. I mean a real, energizing belief, not a form of words, or a dull acquiescence in a half-understood theological theory."

"You don't think much of the verdict of twelve men taken out of the street, then?" Staunton said.

"Frankly, I do not. Even our criminal law allows for their being sometimes mistaken. Miscarriages of justice are not infrequent; yet these are just the subjects on which common sense is entitled to speak—whether A did or did not kill B of malice aforethought, or whether C defrauded D when he represented that his mine was turning out fifty tons of solid ore a week, when in reality it turned out five. To decide these points intelligently requires only the low kind of calculating power which a tradesman or business man would apply to his own concerns. Put the twelve men in the box, and let your learned counsel submit to them the arguments for and against the platonic 'ideas,' the Aristotelian 'entelecheia,' or the 'Sephiroth' of the Kabbala, and who would have the smallest regard or respect for their opinion? It would not be a miscarriage of justice in that case; it would be a miscarriage of metaphysics."

"How are they to know better without education?" asked Staunton. "Yet, as far as I understand, your contention is that education and authority are of no use, and that your doctrine appeals to innate ideas of justice in every man's mind."

"No, no!" he said, rising from his seat, and taking one stride across the room to the fire. "Pardon me, I believe in education, but it must not be of the ordinary kind alone. Without some education nobody can understand any argument. I object to the education which substitutes ready-made opinions of other people, instead of independent personal conclusions got from the depth of the awakened conscience. It is good to read the ancient writers, but it is also good to know that the mind is not trained because it knows what is in the great books of Greece, and India, and Rome, and England. It is a part of a rational education in these days to get rid of prejudices, as well as to acquire knowledge. A man must be highly educated to rise above *authority, or else* extraordinarily gifted by nature. Clear

away the obstructions which prevent even men who are supposed to be superbly educated from knowing what is in their own souls, and they would accept our doctrine readily. But a jury of ordinary men of the world, whether educated or uneducated, is almost equally unsatisfactory as a tribunal for settling this great controversy. But dear me!" he went on, after a slight pause, "I am giving you all a regular dose of dry metaphysics!"

Everybody protested against such an idea. Bob was loudest of all, just because he was inwardly of opinion that the conversation on mysterious subjects had lasted about an hour too long already. Before it quite ended, however, Bastian had gone into some details as to his theories respecting the progress from planet to planet of souls after death. At the end, he said to the two girls—

"You at least must think me a 'dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,' don't you?"

Mildred did not reply audibly. Netta answered, "I think the dream a noble one."

The Miss Vanes were, indeed, so impressed that when they went forth into the street, after bidding Bastian farewell, they walked along in silence to the corner where the main thoroughfare ran at right angles. Here the bustle and traffic seemed almost a desecration. Bastian's absent voice and words rang in their ears above all the thousand discordant noises of the great metropolis.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GARDEN-PARTY.

FREEMANTLE HOUSE had, in the years which had elapsed, suffered some changes, but substantially the old Manor End dwelling-place remained as it had been when Dr. Maturin had first taken a bride into it well-nigh twenty years before. The usurping bricks of modern residences had come nearer it, enclosed it round on nearly every side; for the old borough *had in that period* become almost a part of the metropolis. *The house had, however, kept back the invader from its front*

drive and its gardens at the rear ; and, as we know, the fields which used to stretch away from the sunk fence at the boundary of the garden, and which formed a delightful green vista as seen from the drawing-room windows, had been converted into a public park, so that no houses could possibly be built on this part either.

During the sessions of Parliament, Dr. Maturin had preferred to live nearer to Westminster, so that for half the year at least Freemantle House was without an occupant. Then, in the Parliamentary vacations, the wealthy owner found that there were places which gave him more freedom, and where he could enjoy himself in his own peculiar ways with greater feeling of not being choked by a fog of brutal British prejudice and convention. He liked Monte Carlo, but more for its perfect skies and sunshine and bands than for the advantages to be derived from a resort to the tables. He liked the cheerful Bohemian company he met there, and *al fresco* suppers, and now and then—when the need for excitement came over him—he quite appreciated the benefit of having a palace close by where he could enjoy the gamblers' fever for an hour or so. Then yachting was another of his amusements, and while he himself would be cruising in delightful winter sunshine off the coast of "Barbary," it would give him a really delicious sense of luxurious happiness to know that, with the funds which he had supplied, some poor invalid—a relation of a constituent, as a rule—was at the same moment basking at Torquay or Bournemouth. To all the world that knew of these things it appeared that Dr. Maturin, after his wife's death, and after his elevation to Parliamentary honors, was still the same unselfish, warm-hearted, sympathetic gentleman that he had been before. And universal North London would have protested if anybody had suggested that the portion of Dr. Maturin's anatomy which was gratified and satisfied by these deeds of charity, was his brain and nervous system, and not his conscience to any large degree. A trip to the sunny South in the gloom of a northern winter would have been deprived of half of its enjoyment if he had not been able, in lounging luxuriously on deck, to think of "poor devils" assisted by himself to do the same. The poor devils had to be picturesque, or otherwise interesting, or—now that the doctor had his Parliamentary connection to consider—must be well backed up by influential constituents. *In that case they served to add a delicious aroma to the*

draught of pleasure which the doctor allowed himself; these were no more moral acts than is a pretty woman's adorning of her costume with a natural flower as a finishing touch.

It did not need a very clever inductive philosopher to infer, from the preparations now being made in some parts of Freemantle House and grounds, that Dr. Maturin was back at home, and that he was expecting visitors. His perfect taste prevented the rooms from ever sinking into a state of dowdiness through not being often tenanted; his delicate sensibility to anything approaching discomfort had provided him with excellent servants, who knew exactly how to give to a house an air of civilization and cosy refinement, whenever he should happen to spend a week or two there, without any absurd domestic fuss and turning upside down being considered essential. The wheels of domestic life went round so smoothly in that well-ordered dwelling that the absence of a mistress had really not been felt as it usually is, and had not resulted in any lapse into barbarism.

Dr. Maturin had determined to make the guests he was to receive on a certain summery afternoon in spring very happy. Especially was this to be the case with two of them, the Miss Vanes. They should be reminded of Lesbos; of tea and ices on the lawn at Kalamitri's Vineyard. They should agree, when they went back home, that it was the pleasantest day they had spent since leaving Mytiline. That was why he had decided that his first hospitality to them should consist of a garden-party. He hoped sincerely that the heavens would laugh with him in his jubilee—that it would be a fine day. And it was not only fine, but deliciously and exceptionally balmy, for the time of year.

When the Vane party arrived they found the entrance hall smothered in flowers, and the passage through a greenhouse out into the garden at the back left temptingly open. Through the doorway they had a vision of numerous gayly colored parasols dotting the grass, and fairy-like female costumes of muslin and lace, not unmingled with warm furs. After a very short halt, they themselves passed out into the brilliant throng; and when Dr. Maturin advanced to greet them, his observant and critical eye at once noticed how well the two Miss Vanes were dressed, and how fresh and summery they looked. Which of his lady guests could hope to vie with *Netta's* beauty? he thought. Yet her dress was perfectly simple, with one spray of lilac to set off the prevailing white.

ness of the material ; and she wore a hat which seemed a bewitching medley of straw and natural white flowers.

Mrs. Vane had been left behind, ill. If she could have come, she would ; not that she would have enjoyed accepting Dr. Maturin's hospitality, much less at Freemantle House, still haunted by the memory of the past. But she desired to superintend and guard the doctor's communications with her daughters, and she knew that the colonel was not a good substitute in this character. He needed guarding himself, she began to think, since his sojournings at the club o' nights had become so much more frequent. This day of all others, however, untimely illness had attacked her ; probably she was already pulled down in bodily health by the mental worry attending her husband's position, or rather his utter want of any position at all.

It seemed undeniably good luck to the wily host that Mrs. Vane—still symbolized in his own mind as the dragon guarding the golden apples—was unable to be present. He did not fear her much. He had triumphed over her suspicions so far as to have no obstacles thrown in the way of his intercourse with the family. Her vigilance, he felt, was no match for his cunning. He had thrown her off her guard by a most unloverlike abstention from frequent visits, having proceeded on the more astute principle of leaving a strong impression of himself on the mind of the woman he loved, at the time of their first meeting, and letting her ponder over that during his absence. This plan saved the bore of frequent calls, with a gradually increasing show of affection, all of which Dr. Maturin hated. He liked things to come pretty easily ; not to have to lay too many parallels before storming the fort. A protracted siege was not to his taste in love affairs.

By this time his mind was thoroughly made up, which it had not been when he left Castro. Come what might, he would marry Netta Vane. He would beat down any obstacle to his end. On this September afternoon, quite six months after the arrival of the Vanes from their Eastern home, and while the colonel was still wandering in the wilderness of want of a post, Dr. Maturin had fully decided to bring matters to a crisis.

There was a buzzing of brilliant social butterflies on the velvety turf in front of the windows, and Dr. Maturin as host *was needed everywhere*, and could not attend exclusively to

the Vanes. It seemed, therefore, all the more gracious of him when, after all his visitors seemed to have arrived, and he had no more welcoming to do, he approached the place where Mildred and Netta were standing, chatting and laughing with some friends they had met, and said to the former—

“Now, Miss Vane, you and your sister are connoisseurs in Eastern flowers and trees. I must take you away just for a moment to give me your advice about my pomegranates. I’m afraid they don’t like English damp. This way. I shan’t keep you long ;” and the two girls tripped along at his side, he chatting pleasantly and they answering merrily. He seemed on delightful terms with them both. “Here it is. I call it my Oriental garden.”

He had brought them to a sheltered nook, where an old moss-covered wall diverged at right angles from the side of the house and made a corner ; over it there was stretched a roof of glass, high up, supported on light iron pillars. It was half an open-air garden, half a hothouse, and could be entirely closed at will.

Directly Netta saw it, she gave an exclamation of delight.

“Why, it’s exactly like a bit of our garden at Castro. It’s the piece close to the front door ! Yes, there’s a little scrap of the path, and all. Oh, Dr. Maturin, how could you imitate it so well ?”

“Does it really remind you of Kalamitri’s Vineyard ?” The doctor looked quite pleased and radiant.

“There are the pomegranates, and orange-shrubs, and—yes, there’s a splendid passion-flower. It’s quite an exact reproduction,” Mildred said.

“Then I am repaid for my trouble. I hoped you would think it was like. I had it made on purpose for you.” He was speaking to Mildred, but he looked at her sister as he said this. “But,” he went on, “I don’t know if I haven’t done wrong, after all”—for Netta’s pretty eyes were filling with tears, and he saw it. “Does it bring back painful recollections ? Ah ! it was a blunder ; the past is too happy, perhaps ?”

“No, no, Dr. Maturin !” Netta exclaimed. “It is not a blunder ; you have done quite right. And it’s very kind of you to give us back a piece of our old life at Castro. This is my silly way—when I think of the past, and how happy *we were there*, I always feel melancholy. But I wouldn’t *have missed seeing your Oriental garden for the world.*”

"You know, in cold weather, I can have glass frames fixed onto these pillars in front, so as to make it quite a greenhouse," Dr. Maturin explained. He thought it best to come down to practical details, as a way of getting rid of further doleful retrospect. And he had secured the reward he had expected. He had been praised for his thoughtfulness. The pomegranates and passion-flowers were meant as outward and visible signs of his desire to make himself conspicuously agreeable to the Miss Vanes—to *the* Miss Vane; and he thought they could not fail to understand and appreciate his delicate regard for their susceptibilities.

As he was conducting his fair guests back to the lawn, where refreshments of the usual light and not too exhilarating character were being dispensed, Dr. Maturin said—

"Do you think me a shocking Bohemian for inviting all these people, and having no lady to receive my visitors?"

"A Bohemian! Not at all," Mildred replied. It is probable that she was not yet quite initiated into the subtle social significance of that epithet.

"I dare say some of them do—some of the tattling dowagers, at all events," he went on. "It is not common. But I like doing uncommon things. And then, how can I avoid it? I have no female relative ready to immolate herself on the altar of fashion by acting as hostess;—and no wife."

The last words were said in a tone of real pathos. They made Netta's thoughts fly away unaccountably to Mr. Thesmophorus, and then back again to London, to Mr. Bastian's East End bachelor loneliness. *He* endured existence, at any rate, without a wife. The little handmaiden had acted as hostess there, in the back kitchen. She smiled at the thought. Memory coursed pleasantly backwards to that scene, and then to the memorable conversation they had had.

"Do you believe in re-incarnation, Dr. Maturin?"

"What on earth is she driving at?" thought the doctor.

"No, I don't," he said boldly; and then added, laughing, "What is it?"

"Oh," explained Netta, "it's really a noble doctrine; it's what Mr. Bastian believes. We went there, you know, a few days ago with Mr. Bob—Mr. Betteridge, I mean."

"The deuce you did!" thought their host.

"And Mr. Staunton," Mildred put in.

"Yes. And Mr. Bastian talked to us, and told us of his great views. I wish you could have heard them."

"I wish I had been there too," the doctor said. If he had been, he would have seen if Bob flirted with Netta.

"Every human soul at death," began Netta, perfectly oblivious of the fact that she was at a social gathering where such topics are not generally introduced, "unless perfectly purified already, which is rare—this is the theory—goes into some place which is not heaven; it may be another planet; and it re-enters some other being, so that it may endure trials and temptations over again; and at last when it is quite pure it does not need to be clothed with flesh any more, to be re-incarnated, but goes straight to heaven. And don't you see," she went on, with quick-voiced eagerness, "what a beautiful idea it is, because it holds out hope even to the most degraded? They have another chance; and I think," she ended reverently, "it makes God appear so much more merciful than He seemed before."

They had stopped on a pathway leading to the lawn. It was strange to see this young girl enthusiastically championing these new ideas, and talking theology at a garden-party to a man of the world—a man, too, who a little time back had been a total stranger. Mildred looked at him rather anxiously to see what effect her sister's words would have on him. Would he think them horribly out-of-place? His face, at all events, did not reveal what he thought; he listened attentively. As he did not immediately answer, Mildred said—

"That is only what Mr. Bastian thinks."

"Yes, I see," said Dr. Maturin. "He must be a kind of spiritualist."

Netta was disappointed. She expected Dr. Maturin at once to give *his* views; to plunge into the controversy ecstatically. It was a characteristic of her nature that she thought no time or place unfit for a conversation on the deepest topics. And here was her hero coolly burking discussion by calling Mr. Bastian a spiritualist! It was unworthy and provoking.

"Please don't evade the question, Dr. Maturin," she could not help saying, feeling a little alarmed at her own boldness all the time. "Women like being argued with, as much as men. Do you believe in souls or spirits at all?"

Mildred was not near enough to her sister's arm to pinch it

as a hint reminding her of propriety. And Dr. Maturin was surprised and a little amused to see how insistent, how plucky in sticking to her own views, this frail, beautiful creature was. He was not as happy in his reply as might have been expected.

"I am sure *you* are a spirit," he said, smiling pleasantly at Netta. "There is a line of Shelley which speaks of 'gentle ghosts with eyes as fair as star-beams among twilight trees.' Don't you think that must have been meant for your sister?" he asked Mildred.

Netta sighed in a resigned way. She did not feel flattered by the compliment. She would much rather that Dr. Maturin had told her what he really *did* believe.

"It is a solemn thought," she went on, "that when we are talking to a person younger than ourselves, we may really be in the presence of the soul of a dead friend, which has come back to earth to live its life over again in another body."

Dr. Maturin looked suddenly at her, startled. It was a horrible idea, he thought. This Bastian, who put such ghoulish notions into this girl's head, who was he? Some of the possibilities involved in the doctrine shot across his mind, as he asked, in a tone of assumed indifference—

"Why should a soul come back to *this* earth—to the same temptations it has had before?"

"Oh! Mr. Bastian says it does not always; it may go to other planets," Netta answered eagerly, glad at last to have secured Dr. Maturin's attention. "Perhaps each planet is a little more advanced than the last, and the soul goes on and on from one to another, and re-incarnates itself in each." She had certainly got the new theory at her fingers' ends.

"A kind of steeplechase course through the solar system, in fact," the cynical doctor felt impelled to say. Then, as he saw Netta's look of disappointment, almost of anger, he added quickly, and with an appearance of real earnestness, and desire for her welfare, "Don't misunderstand me. The theory is deeply interesting. But I don't want you to take it up and believe in it, just because this mysterious Mr. Bastian has said it is true."

"That is what I told her," said Mildred, thankfully.

"Mr. Bastian has noble ideas, and leads a most self-denying life," Netta said, rather inconsequently.

"No doubt," replied their host, who was conscious now

of a feeling of distinct repulsion to this shadowy promulgator of terrible doctrines, which he felt might haunt him unpleasantly if he had any tendency whatever to believe in them. What business had a man to set up as an inspired ascetic, a fantastic lay preacher, and inveigle young girls to the East End ?

"I should like to talk about these views again," he said, with marked politeness to the sisters. "Now I must rejoin my guests. There is the great bore of the House of Commons coming to interview me. I won't drag you two into the approaching infliction."

The doctor went forward a few steps, to meet an elderly and amiable-looking though bleary-eyed personage, who was shouting "Maturin ! I say, Maturin !" The two girls wended their way on to the lawn. Before they reached the nearest dispenser of afternoon tea, Mildred began with a sisterly remonstrance—

"How could you be so foolish, Netta ?"

"*He* does not think it foolish, so you ought not to," was the immediate reply.

At the same time Netta wondered in her own mind if she *had* been over-bold and unladylike in her exposition of the new views. If society were an apparatus for suppressing all sensible talk, so much the worse for society !

Soon, however, the two girls were deep in chatter with acquaintances. Dr. Maturin had thoughtfully provided one or two visitors who knew the Vanes. One of the first to recognize and pounce on them was Lady Cathcart, now returned from her Egyptian expedition. Her husband was still at Cairo, which partly accounted for the wife being in England. She wanted to know exactly the ins and outs of Colonel Vane's departure from Castro ; why he had given up his post ; whom he sold that delightful house and garden to ; where he was living now ; whether he was soon going out again. The colonel was glad to give her all the information he could, and dwelt with considerable natural pathos on the distressing character of his present position, brought over from the East under false pretences, receiving official regrets by way of compensation, and stranded in Bayswater. Perhaps, if he painted the picture in a sufficiently dark hue, Lady Cathcart would induce her husband to do something for him.

When the girls arrived on the scene from their little excursion under Dr. Maturin's guidance, Lady Cathcart was

holding forth in her usual decided way on desultory subjects.

"A shame to turn Maturin out of Parliament. Just like the mob: He bears it very well. Now, if it was Sir Digby, he would mope about it for months. Maturin"—she thought it showed masculine independence to leave out the "Doctor"—"is a philosopher; a man I admire. Knows his own mind, and has one worth knowing. What a pretty place he has! Such a day, too, only a chilly feel, don't you think? There's the evening cold creeping on; I feel it now."

The colonel said he thought it very warm.

"You would, because you're well covered. I'm skinny." One of Lady Cathcart's characteristics was that she was quite as frank with herself as with other people. "That bit"—she pointed to a corner of the garden gay with magnificent blossoms of Syrian hibiscus, backed with a row of cypresses and planes—"reminds one of Poonah. My Poonah compound was like that. There was a huge plane, and we often had tiffin under it in the cold weather. You remember it don't you, Vane?"

The colonel said he could not possibly forget some delightful afternoons he had spent there.

"When your wife was at the hills—yes. And how you flirted with the pretty girls!" The colonel protested, but Lady Cathcart went on serenely. "Poonah is delightful. I know you can't stand it. Men think there is nothing in India worth living for but the Maidan at Calcutta, or the Byculla Club at Bombay. Are you going to send your girls out?"

The girls had come within hearing now.

"How attentive Maturin is to the dowagers!" Lady Cathcart went on, not waiting for the colonel's answer to her question. "Look at him over there, actually surrounded by three old female fogies. I must go and talk to him;" and she went, to make a fourth. Her ladyship did not recognize herself as a dowager just yet.

It seemed quite accidental that, half an hour afterwards, the host and a tall, elderly man, being in political conversation together, strolled lazily towards the spot where the Vane girls were standing, and talked for some minutes in a way quite audible to the latter.

"I am a man of science," Dr. Maturin was saying, "and I can't recognize any necessity for one country escaping the fate of all countries hitherto?"

"You don't mean," his interlocutor said, "that you would look complacently on the fall of England?"

"No; I only say that states, like human beings, do perish, whether we like it or not. The usual course, as history shows, is for a country to begin by being ruled by aristocrats, who are too selfish to rule properly, and then to be governed by the people, who are too ignorant. We have had both diseases in England, and I fancy the latter will prove fatal."

"That's the view of a rejected candidate," the other said. "You won't think so brainsickly of things when you get in for another constituency."

"I don't form my opinions or give them up, on such slight grounds as you suggest," Dr. Maturin answered. He turned towards Netta's seat, hoping that she might be free to talk for a time. She *was* free, and the doctor left his political companion, and at once addressed himself to her. "You once said you would like to see the park which used to be part of my grounds, Miss Vane. The people are settled down into chat and tennis and flirtation for some time. Will you and your sister honor me by coming with me now? We can easily slip through a gate behind those bushes. We shall be back very soon."

Once again Dr. Maturin crossed the lawn in company with the "two pretty girls in white," not unnoticed by some eyes among the gathering. Lady Cathcart was telling people who the girls were—"Two Miss Vanes, who've lived all their lives on a Greek island."

"Yet they don't look very savage," one sapient old lady, with vague ideas of geography, suggested.

Meanwhile the doctor and his convoy had picked up the colonel. He did this in order that Mildred might have her cavalier, and that he himself might be left free to talk to her sister. Passing through the wicket-gate, they emerged upon a sloping path which led out on to the broad expanse of turf. The trees shut out all sight of Freemantle House at this spot; the only dwelling visible was the small lodge with its quaint gables at a far-off corner of the fields. Dr. Maturin and Netta led the way. He knew that the colonel ambled along but slowly, and he had only to walk at a brisk pace, talking in an animated fashion to his companion, to get quite out of his and Mildred's hearing. It seemed a natural movement for the doctor, having reached the middle of the field, to stand still and say—

"Why, they are far behind! Shall we just peep into the gatekeeper's lodge?"

The aged custodian of the park had, as we know, been placed in that position by the philanthropic doctor. He was an old servant of the family. He admired Dr. Maturin more even than he admired whisky and tobacco, which was saying a good deal.

"And did you build this house?" Netta asked, when they had made a short inspection of the interior.

"No; it was here before," said the doctor.

"But it's finely altered, miss," put in the old man. "The doctor did *that*, he did. Ah, doctor, there ain't many like *you*!"

"Now, now!" said Dr. Maturin, impatiently.

"Ah! I knows you're a member of Parlymink, and in t' Goovernment, too, what's more; and all *that*, I knows. But lawks! I says, *that* won't make Dr. Maturin different to us poor folk; not it."

The doctor hurried Netta away from this persistent flatterer, as if it really distressed his sensitive nerves.

"I did not take you there that you might have the pleasure of hearing that old gentleman's favorable, too favorable, view of my character," Dr. Maturin said apologetically. "If I had known that he would beslaver me with praise, I would have spared you the infliction."

The words came so readily to his lips, and fell so gracefully from them, that it may well be doubted if the thought occurred to him that he was insincere. Hypocrisy of this light and calculating kind had become part of his nature. But his companion did not know, did not guess, any such thing.

"I don't wonder at his admiration," she said; "it was a noble act to place him there—to give the park to the poor." Netta blushed, doubtful if she had not spoken too warmly.

It was just the encouragement Dr. Maturin wanted.

"How different an English cottage is from a Greek! Do you remember one that we went into—that you and your sister took me to see when I paid that delightful visit to Castro?"

Yes, Netta said she did remember it.

They were sauntering quietly over the turf. Nobody was near. The little boys playing cricket were a hundred yards away. The sound of the sheep-bells came with a gentle

tinkle from a distant corner of the field. Now that her sister's presence and protection were withdrawn, Netta felt far less inclined to enter into an argument with the doctor.

"And have you forgotten," he went on, "something that I said to you then? I told you my life had been lonely, and worldly, and that I wanted to be taught higher things, if there were higher."

Netta felt a rush of blood to the heart. She did not know what was coming—what else Dr. Maturin would say. She thought he was going to tell her he loved her, and to ask her to marry him, and she did not know at all what answer she should make if that were to turn out true. But she rallied the forces of her nature, and said in a low tone, after only a very brief pause—

"I should say the same to you now as I think I said then. You are too clever to be taught. It is I who need teaching more than you. That hymn you left with me *did* teach me."

"Ah! I am glad you admire it. You see, some good thing came even out of ancient Greece. Its wording is almost Christian;" and here Dr. Maturin, in his rich mellow tones, repeated a stanza with which Netta was already familiar, but which seemed to gain additional force and beauty from the exquisitely sympathetic elocution of its reciter—

" " Oh, Heavenly Steersman, guide my homeless bark
Into the harbor where I fain would stay!
And from the crowd wandering in earthly dark
Draw up my soul unto the Holy Day!

They are glorious sentiments," he ended. "I hope that they are true—that there are facts to which they correspond in nature."

"Shall I tell you what they remind me of, if you won't think it silly?" Netta asked.

"Silly? Of course not."

"Then, they remind me of that verse of the child's hymn. I never hear it without feeling inclined to cry; it brings back my little sisters to me." And Netta, her voice tremulous with emotion, in her turn repeated the old, old words—

" " Around the throne of God in heaven
Thousands of children stand,
Children whose sins are all forgiven,
A holy, happy band."

She was looking down on the grass as she repeated the lines, but at the end she lifted her eyes towards her companion's face, half wishing and half fearing to point the moral by a reference to the need of every human soul for forgiveness; yes, even so great and complex, and possibly world-stained, a soul as she believed Dr. Maturin to possess. But his object was very far indeed from being to lead this girl at his side on to indulge in an open-air homily, things which at the best of times he detested. Indeed, he saw now that the conversation was straying away a little from the prepared channel, and he was determined to bring it back from the religious turn which it had taken.

"Yes, it's a lovely hymn, that," he said, before she had time to say anything by way of comment. "I have always admired some of the Church hymns; they are splendid poetry, especially Keble's." He felt sure that he was pursuing the right line now. He had shown Netta Vane before, at Mytiline, that some of his opinions were heterodox, and left room for her missionary efforts, which always flattered women; but she would be glad to know that in marrying him she would not be accepting a person quite out of sympathy with her most cherished views. "I would like, some day," Dr. Maturin went on, growing effusive under the genial influence at his side, "to found or endow a church." He thought as he said it of Lord Thurlow and the buttress, and smiled to himself. Netta looked at him with pleased eyes. "But——" he stopped, and said with low-voiced impressiveness, "if I ever do that sort of thing, Miss Vane, I should need help. Not material help; I don't mean that. But the priceless gift of sympathy, without which, as an American poet has said, a man walks to his own funeral, dressed in his shroud. And in all this wide world there is no sympathy so pure, so perfect, so elevating, as that of an innocent and noble-minded woman. Will you give me yours?"

"You have mine already, Dr. Maturin," Netta said, with obvious embarrassment—"in everything you undertake that is for the good of others."

"I want more, much more than that. I am a good deal older than you, and have seen more of the world; but I have never seen one so fitted to guide me in the right path, and at the same time so worthy of admiration for every quality that ennobles womanhood. On your side there is youth, exquisite loveliness, a charming, fascinating disposition, so that every

one that approaches you adores you." The vision of Bob Betteridge and Bastian flashed across Dr. Maturin's brain. "On my side what is there? Innumerable shortcomings, I know; but I feel hardly conscious of them at present, for they and every other quality I possess are all swallowed up in an unspeakable love for you, in an unspeakable longing that you may, if not now, at some future day, learn to reciprocate that love."

He spoke with every evidence of intense emotion. This love was not hypocritical; it had entered into his being. He felt every word that he uttered, and his longing was not assumed or exaggerated; he *did* long inexpressibly that the fair girl at his side would consent to take that place in his life and heart which he had once hoped his first wife would occupy, but which she proved unequal to fill.

How different for Netta the circumstances of the first proposal of marriage which had been made to her, by Mr. Thesmophorus in his own garden at Castro, and this offer of Dr. Maturin's! Both men talked with passion in their voices; but Thesmophorus had made her feel inclined to laugh, while Hartas Maturin's pleading tones drew tears into her eyes, and raised in her nature a strange, almost terrible, commotion. Was she in love with him? Was this the love that she had read so much about in books? Yet it did not overpower her, as perhaps it ought, if it were the genuine feeling. She was not conscious of an impetuous stream of sentiment sweeping all before it; it was more a strongly rising tide, not yet at the full, bearing her with silent awestruck compulsion on to acceptance of this love, which she could not doubt was sincere.

Now, however, that the decisive moment had come, she was conscious of a vague unwillingness to pledge herself. For the first time it suddenly occurred to her that Dr. Maturin had been her father's friend—that he was almost old enough to be her father. Yet she did admire him, she knew, more than any man she had met in her short life. He was noble in many of his thoughts, he had done unselfish deeds; he *was* a hero, in spite of her mother's doubts. Then she thought that she could lead him in the right path, as he had said, nursing the shortsighted belief of womankind from the beginning of all things, that the same influence which she *exerted now* was sure to continue forever. Pity is not the *only feeling* which is akin to love. Disapproval of a lover's

opinions and a desire to be the means of his amendment can, if skilfully treated, be made excellent foundations on which the edifice of maidenly affection can be built up.

"You have not answered. Shall I have no answer? Do you love me?" Dr. Maturin bent his head down to the level of her averted eyes, and spoke in that imperious yet soft whisper which had fascinated so many women before.

"I think I do." Netta turned her face round to him; she was blushing, and half smiling, half inclined to sob. "But I am not certain," she added hastily, noticing an inclination on the part of Dr. Maturin's arm to encircle her deliciously slim waist. "That is, I think—I think I can tell you better another time."

"Oh, tell me now; Miss Vane, Netta, tell me now, and put me out of this pain! Your love makes me a new creature; your scorn will kill me." His strong, rich voice melted away into a supplicating tenderness more exquisite than had ever been uttered by child of man to the woman of his desire. Netta was only seventeen, and not composed of adamant.

"Yes," she said, giving him her hand, which he pressed passionately to his lips; "I think—I am sure—that I *do* love you. There is nobody else I love so well; but I am very—very young and inexperienced, and this is all so sudden"

"My darling, I don't want to take you by surprise. If I thought I was doing that I would leave you now. I know your character well. I have studied it. You are impulsive, but you are also discriminating. You would not run lightly into anything. And your quiet thoughts will, I am sure, confirm what you have said to me, what has made me most supremely and deliriously happy." The doctor did not look delirious, but he was evidently much moved. He did not quite believe in what he had said about Netta's character being unlikely to drive her into any situation in a hurry. But he had great confidence that she would be very unwilling to pain him by withdrawing from her promise. He had desired to get a distinct pledge, and not to run the risk of a consultation with Mrs. Vane spoiling the effects of his own passionate pleadings.

"Shall we go on again?" Netta said.

"Do you know, dearest, one thing that attracted me tremendously in you—I mean, beside the fact that you are the

most beautiful woman in the world, and the most angelic character?"

Netta laughed. It was a relief to her feelings to be able to take a merry view of things again.

"Well, I suppose it was my general silliness?"

"Not at all; you are not silly. You are very sensible—much more sensible than I am, with all my Parliamentary experience and piles of useless learning."

They had advanced far enough now to have come within sight of a corner of the lawn, gay and glancing with the colors of the dresses and parasols, and of a part of the house as well. It was the professional end of the building whose windows the doctor had full in view. He saw the window of the room where his first wife had died—yes, died; that was the way in which time had mellowed the event for him. And with that prospect before him, and his heart filled with a dominant passion which swallowed up the quiet regret he felt for that far-past episode, he thought to himself that he would certainly be good to *this* wife. He would be kind. He had come to know now what his own nature required, and what real love was. His love for Netta was not the brainless sentiment of youth, but the mature fruit of experience; about this woman, at any rate, he felt he could not be mistaken.

"You have not told me what it was, Dr. Maturin."

"Hartas. You must call me Hartas."

"I will—some other day."

"Ah! it ought to be to-day. But I will let you off. You have promised. Well, it was your strange resemblance to my first wife, my poor dead Janet, that first roused in me curious feelings. You have nearly the same eyes, the same high beautiful brow, the expression of the mouth, even, is the same. There is something which reminds me, I cannot tell how or why, but which reminds me of her so much in every word you utter."

"What was her name?" Netta asked. She felt it would be absurd to be jealous of a rival who had been dead years ago. Still, she did not quite relish the resemblance which the doctor had discovered.

"Janet," he replied.

"How curious that my name should be the same!"

"No, not really." He was thinking of explaining that her mother had been a great friend of his first wife's, and that

very likely she chose the name for that reason; but instinct warned him that it would be wisest not to throw himself into the past tense too much; not to give the idea that he belonged to a generation back. "Mind, Netta," he went on, "I love you more than I ever loved her. It is right for me to tell you that. You won't be coming in for the residue and poor remainder of my affections; they are yours altogether—yours to bless and sanctify, or yours to throw away as not being worth the keeping."

This last appeal made Netta look up at him in a half-reproachful way. They were near the gate now.

"I will call to-morrow, early," were his last private words. "Darling, how I do love you!"

"I won't tell mamma to-day," she said.

Mildred's pensive eyes surveyed her sister scrutinizingly, when they met again. She felt a certain responsibility, as Mrs. Vane was absent. But since the Thesmophorus incident we know that she trusted Netta to behave quite properly in matters of the heart. It was characteristic of Mildred that, in thinking of her sister as likely to be fallen in love with, she almost forgot the possibility of anything of the sort occurring to herself. Yes, certainly Netta *did* look upset, disturbed. ~~What~~ could Dr Maturin have been saying to her? Not proposing, surely. For the first time the idea of a marriage between the prosperous widower and her sister struck her as unfit and incongruous. Perhaps they had been merely disputing on the merits of the Greeks.

The colonel said—

"I must be going, Maturin. The girls are to be home by six, and it's five now."

"Very well. But I shall hope to see you all again soon. How did you like the park, Miss Vane?"

"I thought it much greener than the lawn at Kalamitri's Vineyard, but the view was not so good," Mildred replied, with a severe eye to the practical.

And as Dr. Maturin said "Good-bye" at the gate into the road, all that he could do to attest his love was to press Netta's hand in parting—a pressure which was slightly, only slightly, returned. Then he stood for a minute watching them out of sight before returning to his guests—which Mildred thought odd.

Some of the guests probably thought his absence for half an hour from his own lawn still odder. But then, Dr. Ma-

turin had a way with him, and a cultivated Bohemianism at times, which people were used to; and his gayety, politeness, and general affability for the rest of the afternoon made up for his slight breach of the rules of hospitality.

Yes, he thought, as the last guest disappeared, he was really being drawn over to Netta's admiration of virtue, now that he was sure of her love. He would be a saint under her guidance; he would give up his respect for the heathen Greeks; he would try if he could not repent the murder—he meant, his wife's decease;—all this he planned in self-satisfied comfort. It would be easy to repent of what had turned out to be mainly useless. It would also be easy to attend to philanthropy, even to religious duties, as Parliamentary prospects were so dark; and to surrender worldly ambitions now that the one great ambition which had eaten into his soul, the ambition to marry Netta Vane, was about to be gratified. So thought, and so planned, happy Hartas Maturin. He was inexpressibly happy, although he was entering the hall of Freemantle House, and saw on one side the drawing-room door, at the threshold of which the cat had sprung at him, and on the other the door which had led the first Janet to meet the ambushed death beyond.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NETTA HAS HER WAY.

“MOTHER, I have something very important to tell you.”

They were sitting together in the back room of the Bayswater lodgings, Mrs. Vane and Netta, whither they had retired to avoid the rattle of traffic in the front of the house. Breakfast had been over for at least an hour. Colonel Vane had gone to his club. Mildred had gone out shopping, her sister, contrary to custom, resisting her invitation to accompany her on that errand. The latter wanted, for particular reasons, to have half an hour alone with her mother. She had never dreamed of concealing from Mrs. Vane the incident of the past eventful day, when the visit to Freemantle House took place, with Dr. Maturin's ardent declaration of what appeared a very genuine affection. Mrs. Vane had been the best of

mothers to the two girls, ruling them by love when they were children, and not ruling them at all, except by example, when they had come to years of discretion. She had always entered so fully into their feelings and wishes, had played the part of a sympathetic elder sister, rather than that of a parent speaking with the voice of traditional authority, so well, because so naturally,—that neither had ever felt the necessity of concealment, except in such things as it constituted a loss of dignity to reveal. A great sense of her own dignity, a profound self-respect, lay at the basis of Netta's nature. It prevented her simplicity ever appearing laughable; it took from those who admired her transparent openness any feeling that her nature was shallow as well as clear. If she was silent on a subject, she was silent on principle, not from cunning. Characters of great inherent uprightness often combine in the most paradoxical way in the world a thoughtful reticence and guileless willingness to make confidants.

Now, as she sat over her book, pretending to read, Netta hesitated for long to speak. She knew her mother disliked Hartas Maturin. She felt that this dislike was unjust—one of the few matters on which she did not implicitly trust her mother's judgment. She had never heard a word breathed that would have cast any doubt on the manner in which her lover's first wife had met her death; she had taken Hartas at his own valuation, as an honorable English gentleman, as she would have taken anybody her father introduced to the domestic circle, leaving the burden of proof that he was otherwise to any uncharitable devil's advocate who chose to asperse obvious virtue. Yet, although she was so positive in her own mind that her mother's dislike of Dr. Maturin was unreasonable, it was none the less awkward, and indeed painful, for her to have to break to that mother, so kind, so sympathetic, so wishful for her worldly welfare, the intelligence that this man desired to make her his wife, and that she concurred in the wish. And as the sense of the unhappiness she might be about to cause her friends became stronger as the moments flew, she almost began to wish that there were no necessity for any announcement—to revise her feelings. Was Dr. Maturin really lovable? Ought she to marry him? Had she known him long enough to test him properly? But when these thoughts became prominent, she indignantly dismissed them. What a wrong she was doing this stainless gentleman—this healer of other people's woes—this man

whom all liked, and nearly all respected! She ought to be ashamed of herself, she argued, for ever allowing any doubting thought to mar his image in her mind. She ought to be ashamed of being such a coward. Half an hour and more had gone, and she had said nothing. She *would* speak, and at once.

"Mother, I have something very important to tell you."

Mrs. Vane, who had been sitting writing at the table, absolutely unconscious of any disturbance of her daughter's mind, stopped her pen abruptly, and looked quickly round. Netta's face had a beautiful flush on it, denoting inward excitement. In a moment Mrs. Vane's thought covered the whole ground of possibilities. She felt sure somebody had proposed to the girl. If she had rejected him there would not be any need of excitement; no, she had said "Yes," or wanted to say "Yes." The sole remaining question was, who could her lover be? In a flash the names of all the marriageable males of her acquaintance came before Mrs. Vane's eye; Netta might have chosen well, after all. Still, she was conscious of a horrible misgiving, as she answered quickly—

"Something very important, dear? What is it?"

Netta left her seat, drew a chair close to her mother's side, and put her arm round her waist. With sweet, engaging frankness, with modest simplicity, through her tears and blushes, she gave her unconscious stab.

"I ought to tell you at once, mother dear. Dr. Maturin has asked me to be his wife. I hope you won't mind?"

Mind! What the announcement meant to her mother was mercifully hidden from her vision. The very worst that Mrs. Vane had ever half feared in her darkest hours in Kalamitri's Vineyard had come true! No, there was still a change—a hope that Netta might not have pledged herself; that she might be won back from a fatal attachment; that she was willing—unlike most maidens—to receive good advice in a matter of the heart. This maiden was looking anxiously into her mother's face, to see what effect the news would have. She was prepared for that startled look, for the yearning anxiety which she read there; she was not prepared to see how pale her mother had become, nor for the terrible dread and pity that seemed to speak in her accents, as she asked tremblingly—

"Darling, you have not accepted him, surely?"

"Oh, mother, I am so sorry to make you unhappy!" and Netta hid her face in her mother's lap for a moment. She felt the tears falling on her hair. Oh, why could not she spare this pain? What was Hartas, that her mother should so loathe him? She checked her sobs, and, raising her head, said, with a touch of indignation, "But he is a good and noble man, mother, and nobody has a right to speak against him. He honors me by loving me. If I did not marry him, it would be just the same honor."

Every word Netta uttered was so much more confirmation of the horrible truth, as it appeared to Mrs. Vane, that her daughter did love Maturin—had been drawn into his toils, like—like another victim she remembered. The horror and tragedy of the idea overcame her. That she should have borne and nurtured a daughter for this fate! For with the revelation came back in all its original strength her distrust of the specious doctor's character; she thought of the first Janet's dying request that the child should bear her name; she thought of the colonel wanting "Maturin" added, and of her refusal; but the name which she had kept away from her baby at the font that child was going now to take upon herself of her free will! Yet, even at this distressing crisis, Mrs. Vane proved the excellent mother that she had always been. Her duty—she thought of her duty amid her tears, which would well out—was evidently to do her best to dissuade her daughter while there might be time. After all, Netta had never been told of the suspicions which she and Uncle George had cherished. She knew her daughters were both girls of strong principle. If Netta believed in the murder theory, or were even inclined to believe it, Mrs. Vane felt she would never dream of uniting her lot to that of the supposed offender. What did it matter that it was so long ago? She hastily swept her tears away, and, sitting down opposite her daughter, began more calmly her task of motherly obligation. It was no good, she knew, to attack or abuse Dr. Maturin. That would make any girl of spirit cling to him the more. She would state nothing but plain fact; and here her practical bent helped her.

"You have not actually accepted him, Netta dear?" was her first question.

"I have not said 'No.' Yes, I think I did accept; it was so sudden, I was taken by surprise, mother. It was when we were walking about at his garden-party."

"It is considered very dishonorable of a man to propose marriage to a young lady at his own house, dear. You did not know that. But we won't discuss that, because, if you love him, it does not so much matter where or how he proposes. You have told him to wait."

"I said I should be able to answer better in a day or two; and he said he would call to-day."

There was some slight relief in this for Mrs. Vane. The affair did not seem settled.

"You must think it over, darling. To-day is far too soon to give a definite answer."

"Oh! but I did answer—I did promise. And I think—in fact, I know I love him. And so it is right for me to say 'Yes,' mother, is it not?"

Mrs. Vane suppressed the pang at her heart resolutely.

"You know he is a widower, middle-aged, while you are a mere girl."

"I know he had a wife once—a long time ago."

"Did he tell you how she died?"

"No mamma."

"When did he speak to you about her?"

"At Castro; the day we went to that picnic."

Mrs. Vane cast her thoughts regretfully on the past. How she would have guarded her nest from the serpent's entrance, if she had guessed what was to follow! No doubt, Dr. Maturin was scheming even then to entrap Netta.

"His wife was a great friend of mine. It seems absurd for you to marry a man old enough to be your father."

"Oh, but his wife was—was younger than you, was not she?"

"Yes, rather younger," Mrs. Vane admitted.

"And Hartas—I mean Dr. Maturin—is not old; he is not even middle-aged, I am sure. I don't believe he is more than thirty-five or thirty-six. Men of that age often marry quite young girls."

The powers of special pleading developed by love in her daughter astonished Mrs. Vane.

"Ask him his age, dear. He is forty-two if he is a day. He is quite middle-aged. I noticed a tendency in his hair to turn gray already." This was a cunning stroke. It may be doubted if the statement was one that, in her calmer moments, this excellent matron would have been able to reconcile with *her moral principles*. But all is fair in love, especially when

the love is misplaced, and the victim is a daughter—to a mother's thinking.

The daughter flushed a little. No, she did not believe that Dr. Maturin was too old for her. Suppose he were fifty, what then? She had read, in novels, of men, of sixty marrying; those were exceptional cases, she knew, where circumstances were represented as severing two loving hearts early in the story, only to meet again, with the old affections miraculously preserved, when half a century or so had rolled between. But if sixty were not too old for marriage, it followed that forty was quite young for such an enterprise. Still, the thought of gray hairs disturbed her. She believed it was a calumny. Unquestionably Mrs. Vane's first shot had been well-aimed. She followed up her success with another shrewdly devised onslaught. She would try these slight attacks before unmasking her real batteries.

"Dr. Maturin is a gambler. He used to get your father to play at cards at the Club. They played for heavy stakes, and somehow the doctor always won. Your father lost several sums of money to him."

Poor Netta could not bear this. She felt sure it was a mean attempt to traduce her idol. She could not disbelieve her mother's veracity, but she must have been misinformed; she would ask her father herself. She would do more; she would ask Hartas. She now rose from her seat, and said indignantly—

"I think it is a shame to take away men's characters on hearsay."

"Hearsay? But I know it for a fact."

"You were never at the Club, mamma. Somebody has misled you by a false report. I am sure Dr. Maturin is far too honorable to lead anybody to play for money—I mean, to make people lose on purpose."

"Why, dear, do you suppose, when they play for high stakes, they try to lose themselves?"

"No. I dare say men do gamble. They say it adds interest to games; and if they do not go too far, perhaps——" But here inexorable principle brought Netta to a standstill. She could not pretend to excuse what she did not approve of; so she ended apologetically, "That was many years ago."

"Yes, of course. It was when your father and Dr. Maturin were friends in England, nearly twenty years back."

They were companions. It seems ridiculous, it really does—and I am sure your father and everybody we know will think the same—for you to throw yourself away on a man who was your father's friend in youth, especially," Mrs. Vane added, "one whose character is open to grave question." The next instant she regretted her blunder.

"It is a burning, crying shame!" Netta exclaimed, her eyes flashing. She was too excited to weep. "It is wicked—one of the wickedest things that can be done, I think—to say false things against men just because one dislikes them."

Mrs. Vane replied in a low voice—

"Suppose these things are true?"

"They cannot be. You say his character is bad. Nobody else thinks so. He is universally admired and respected. He is a noble-hearted man. See how well he takes being turned out of Parliament. It is true Christian resignation."

"Or pride," interjected Mrs. Vane.

Netta went on, regardless of the interruption—

"Then, how kind and good he is to the poor! I *know* his heart bleeds for them. What have other people done so generous and practical as giving that park? He is known as a great philanthropist. It is impossible for a man like that to have a bad character. He may be mistaken in some of his views, and, no doubt, too much contact with the world loosens the hold on Christian truth"—probably she was thinking of certain remarks which Dr. Maturin had made at Castro—"but I do thoroughly believe in him; I do indeed, mother. I am so sorry you are so prejudiced against him. Try—*try* and like him for my sake!" She stretched her hands appealingly towards her mother.

"It is always for your sake, my darling, whatever I do—yours and Mildred's. Have you told *her* of this proposal?" Mrs. Vane suddenly thought that Mildred's common sense would be a useful addition to her own powers of opposition to this hateful match.

"No, mamma, not yet."

Mrs. Vane determined to bring her heaviest artillery into play.

"Don't sit opposite me, dear. There, sit in that armchair, while I talk to you a little. You are disturbed. Of course *you* are young, and this kind of thing always excites young *women*. And you know I don't wish to pain you. Will you

listen while I tell you something which I think you ought to know ? ”

Netta threw herself wearily into the deep armchair. Yes, of course she would listen. She knew her lover was to be calumniated. Well, if it was her duty to listen, it was her duty to disbelieve.

“ This Dr. Maturin,” Mrs. Vane began, “ married Janet Betteridge, as I dare say you know. He had a little money, and she had a great deal. Her foster-parents did not disapprove of the match, because Dr. Maturin was known to be a clever man, likely to rise in the world, and I suppose his pleasant manners fascinated them as much as her. I am not sure that Mrs. Betteridge approved of her daughter’s, or rather her niece’s, choice. She regretted it very much afterwards. Her brother-in-law, poor Janet’s uncle, who is a solicitor—I don’t think you have ever seen him; a most intelligent, kind-hearted man—he was against the marriage from the first. He saw through Dr. Maturin, and tried to place it out of his power to play ducks-and-drakes with his niece’s money.”

“ I suppose,” Netta could not help interrupting her mother, to make one attempt at self-defense, “ a solicitor would call giving money to found a park for the poor playing ducks-and-drakes with it ? ”

“ No, not necessarily. It depends on the motive with which charity is given. At all events, this uncle, Mr. George Betteridge, disapproved of the match, and warned Janet’s foster-parents, but they disregarded his advice, and there was a kind of quarrel. Janet Betteridge and Hartas Maturin had only been married three years, when she died suddenly and mysteriously.”

“ Did she die at that house Hartas lives in now ? ”

“ Yes, Freemantle House; the very same.”

“ What did she die of ? ”

“ It was called an accident.”

“ Oh, how dreadful! What suffering poor Hartas must have gone through ! ”

“ I don’t know about the suffering. I will tell you the facts, and you can judge for yourself.”

“ That is just what I want,” Netta said, assuming an air of judicial attention. She was really deeply interested in this story of the past, though she knew it would be colored by her mother’s prejudices.

“ Remember, dear,” Mrs. Vane proceeded, I am going to

tell you everything I know, even secrets that were told to me by others. It is my duty as your mother. Some of it I don't wish repeated, especially not to Dr. Maturin."

"There will be no need, I am sure."

"They had no children. His wife and I became great friends. She was a lovable, impulsive creature, and she had a face like yours. I am afraid you are like her in trusting people too much as well. They did not agree on money matters; they had disputes together. Then one day she was found lying stone dead on the carpet in her husband's laboratory. She had been suffocated."

Netta gazed at her mother with open-mouthed horror.

"There was an inquest held, and they brought it in an accident." Here she gave a little sigh of relief. "It seemed that Dr. Maturin was in the habit of experimenting, and by some means he had filled his private room with a deadly anæsthetic vapor. His poor wife must have gone into the room, unsuspecting of any danger, was overpowered with the gas, became unconscious, and so died. Mrs. Longstaff, the housekeeper, was the first to find her lying there."

"I suppose Hartas—Dr. Maturin—explained at the inquest how the accident arose?"

"Oh, yes; he gave an explanation. He had only got this machine for making the gas into his house a few weeks before, about the time that these money disputes were beginning. I read the account of his evidence afterwards. I was too ill at the time to go to it; your birth, my dear, was shortly expected then."

"Who told you that Dr. Maturin and his wife quarrelled about money?"

"She told Mr. George Betteridge, her uncle, shortly before her death, that her husband was trying to obtain from her the control over some of her dowry, and he advised her not to yield. Dr. Maturin pretended it was for some good object; he admitted, however, that he wanted to make people grateful, and so to get into Parliament."

"Pretended!"

"Whatever it was, pretence or not, there was this quarrel going on. Mrs. Longstaff told Mr. Betteridge that on the day of Janet's death Dr. Maturin was sitting in the drawing-room. She saw him come out, and listen at the door connecting with his laboratory, and then go back again. It made her suspicious."

"She must have been a very suspicious person altogether."

"Perhaps. When I saw dear Janet for the last time, she told me that I seemed as if I were her only friend."

"It was very wrong of her to say things against her husband!" The tone of indignation was not assumed.

"Oh, she was the soul of honor! She blurted it out, and was quite nervous afterwards about what she had said—tried to convince me she was very happy, and all that. Then there was another strange thing she said."

"What was that?"

"She asked me if I had ever heard of a great Mr. Peabody, a noted philanthropist, committing a murder."

Netta looked at her mother in surprise,

"I see you are as mystified as I was. Even now I don't quite understand it. But Mr. George Betteridge and I talked it over after the death. I ought to have told you that Janet explained, when I asked what she meant, that it was something her husband had said. Now, don't you see how all this tells against your lover? He must, we think, have revealed something in his sleep. He was a philanthropist, too, and he might have laughed at the idea of a philanthropist like Mr. Peabody or himself ever being suspected of murder. He counted on his reputation as a charitable man, as a friend of the poor, and I believed at the time—and so, I know, did Janet's uncle—that he had trapped his wife into that fatal room, knowing that the result would be her death."

Netta rose from her chair, and almost flung it from her.

"You accuse Hartas of being a murderer?"

"I suspect him of being one."

The first effect of the revelation was a burst of scornful laughter on the listener's part. She was terribly angry; the accusation had in it something at once terrible and ludicrous.

"You are all in league against him, to blacken his character—one of the most honorable, high-minded, stainless men in England. If Mr. Betteridge thought Hartas a murderer, why did he not prosecute him? You say yourself the jury decided that it was an accident. Do accidents never happen, and people die in consequence? And then, what reason could there have been to commit murder? To get hold of some money which he wanted for a good purpose, as you acknowledge. What! Do men murder their wives in order to *give money away in charity?*"

Mrs. Vane was prepared for this burst of indignation. She admitted in her own mind that the accusation *did* seem strange. And it must be confessed that with the lapse of time the definiteness of her suspicion had lost its edge. The fact that this supposed wife-murderer had lived for sixteen years and more without being even suspected of any other misdeed—that he had gained honor and high position in the interval—did conflict with her ideas of the probable behavior of assassins. She was willing to admit that her daughter's arguments had weight in them.

"Dr. Maturin is a peculiar character. He must not be judged as we judge other men. My view of him is that he is an extraordinary mixture of goodness and badness. I wish to be fair. I don't desire to traduce anybody. There is a doubt, I know; but how can I give my consent to my daughter marrying a man who *may* be a murderer? Mrs. Vane spoke with intense feeling.

"I am willing to take the danger. I know you are mistaken. I will prove it by living with him!" Netta at that moment felt no doubts. Her spirit rose to meet the supposed Peril.

"Ah! *she* lived with him three years, and then died. My darling, if that first Janet could rise from her grave, she would beg me to prevent this match. You are so like her. I seem to see her now as she sat when she came to me to try and be reassured by me as to her husband's character. I *know* that was what she wanted. And she asked me to call my next child after her. And so I did, but I prayed you might not have her nature; that you would not be easily led away,—I don't mean led away from what is right, for I can trust you entirely, but impressed by a man who talks plausibly and looks handsome."

"I hope that is not *my* character," Netta said gravely.

Mrs. Vane heard Mildred's step in the hall. Her own strategy had not been too successful. She would tell her eldest daughter of the facts—she would induce *her* to dissuade her sister.

Mrs. Vane went out, and in five minutes Mildred entered. Her eyes were glistening and bright with tears. But her sister did not notice them. She was sitting in the armchair, her hands clasped, thinking over what her mother had told *her*. There was new knowledge that required digesting. *What a horrible death, that of his first wife! What a shock*

it must have been to him! Of course, it was an accident. *Could* there have been a quarrel about money? She did not believe it. The vision of that first wife was nevertheless disturbing. Netta did not like the idea of being named after her, still less of resembling her. But it proved, she thought, that Hartas had really loved his wife that he chose somebody like her now. This was a comforting thought. To call him a murderer was an outrageous calumny.

It is one of the safeguards of great crimes that there is a natural disinclination to believe that anybody could be wicked enough to perpetrate them. Especially is this the case when the only person suspected is an ordinary-looking, respected, and influential citizen. The curiosity to see murder trials arises from the half-cherished notion that the culprit must be a monster in shape and feature as well as in character. Dr. Maturin had the advantage of this instinctive charity in human nature. Even Mrs. Vane, as we saw, had considerable doubt as to the justice of those old suspicions of hers and Uncle George's. Yet she was determined to move heaven and earth before yielding to a match she hated.

She first moved Mildred. Mildred sat down by her sister, and put her arm caressingly round her neck.

Netta stopped thinking, and looked up gratefully. She saw that Mildred knew of her engagement. She looked anxiously to see if she disapproved—if *she* too thought her wicked for loving Hartas Maturin.

Mildred began, indeed, by some gentle expostulation. She felt bound to do so, at her mother's wish. She herself neither liked nor disliked Dr. Maturin. Still, she thought him too old for her sister.

It needed only a few minutes' conversation to convince her that this objection, at any rate, was not strong enough to conquer Netta's determination. Was she sure he loved her? Was she sure she loved him? Better than Mr. Thesmophorus? Then curiosity gained the upper hand. How had it all happened? Ah! she thought her sister looked strange after that garden-party. But she *must* be prudent, and take ample time to think the matter over, especially as her mother so strongly disliked the idea.

When Mrs. Vane came in, half an hour afterwards, she found Netta erect in her chair, talking volubly, with flushed face, while Mildred was sitting in a very sympathetic attitude close by, crying quietly. It was the exact reverse of what

she wanted. She had wished Mildred to talk, and Netta to cry. She would next move her husband to interfere. Then, if he failed, she would go to Mr. George Betteridge, whose business address she still preserved in some compartment of her travelling-desk.

Dr. Maturin called a little later, but at present Mrs. Vane's strategy proved too powerful for him. He was told that the whole family were out! It was one of the very few occasions on which Mrs. Vane felt that the end would justify the means, and that she was ready to take any risk entailed by a lie told in such an admirable cause.

CHAPTER XXVII.

COLONEL VANE LAYS HIMSELF OPEN.

It would be a mistake to imagine that Colonel Vane had internal resources which enabled him to survive these months of uncertainty, inactivity, and disappointment without feeling the need of some excitement to drown thought. The doors of the Junior Portman were still open to him, and he spent a great deal of his time within its jovial precincts. There were many men who liked to meet him. He was always pretty good company, even when depressed. There was a guileless openness about his complaints of how he had been treated by Government which made them interesting to people who had not heard them before; and when it was discovered that no conversation with the victim could be held without the tale of wrong being told at length, it became a standing joke to draw the colonel out.

Dr. Maturin did not very often frequent the Club. He had no desire whatever to have the colonel going home to his wife and saying, "I had such a jolly game of whist with Dr. Maturin last night," and leading the astute female dragon of Bayswater to the conclusion that her spouse had been losing money to himself. The more he reviewed the position, the more he felt that it would be a useful adjunct to his plans if he could bind Colonel Vane by something stronger than the ties of gratitude for the past, or faint expectation for the future. At the same time, he was not going to have a direct

money transaction between Vane and himself. Nothing could be easier, if he had chosen to do it, than to lure the colonel into his net, and, with the aid of wine, and the genius of good-fellowship, and one or two acquaintances, to make him finish up deeply in debt to him, Dr. Maturin. Suppose Colonel Vane owed him a thousand pounds. He would be safe to let the fact out to his wife, or to Uncle George or somebody, and then how simple it would be for them to accuse him of getting the colonel into his clutches in order to help on his marriage with the daughter!

The fact was that the doctor wanted to have a hold over Vane chiefly as a means of guarding himself against any hostility which Mrs. Vane might show when she heard of the engagement between himself and Netta. If the latter were to announce the engagement to her mother, and the colonel had no strong reason for wishing the match to come off, he foresaw that it was quite possible that the Vane family would get frightened and "bolt." That was how he thought of the matter. The power he sought to get over Netta's father was not at all as a lever to force her to marry him. That was unnecessary, as he felt sure she herself liked and admired him intensely; and besides, he had knowledge enough of female nature to be aware that maidens are not directly purchasable nowadays. It was as a means of silencing anticipated trouble from the dragon; of inducing the colonel to exercise all his authority in order to persuade her to approve of the marriage; of chaining the family to London, that he prepared—soon after his rejection as a member of Parliament—to put forth all his powers of intrigue to land the colonel in a little financial difficulty.

It was shortly before the East End expedition of the two Miss Vanes that Mr. George Betteridge, now a portly and rather infirm old gentleman, was surprised to have a call at his business office from a person who seemed at first sight a complete stranger. On looking at the card which he presented, however, he at once recognized a name he knew well enough. In the old days he had often chatted with the colonel, as one of poor dead Janet's trustees.

"Vane! Colonel Vane! Husband of Mrs. Vane, eh? who used to live at—let me see—Finchley?"

"Quite so," said Colonel Vane, depositing his hat on a pile of papers tied up with tape, first carefully blowing the dust away.

"Thought you had all gone away for good. Bless me, what a time it is since I saw you or your good lady! I should enjoy a talk with her again, I think. And you've called upon business, I suppose? Sit down, pray."

The colonel took a straight-backed chair, while the solicitor sat in his armchair at his desk. The colonel's seat was uncomfortable; but it was not more uncomfortable than he was himself at the prospect of unburdening himself of what he had to say.

"I don't know any London lawyers," he began; "and my wife has always spoken so highly of you, I thought I would come and ask *your* advice about a little—ahem!—temporary difficulty in which I find myself placed."

Now, Uncle George had been scanning his visitor's countenance, and at the same time recalling all that he could remember of what Mrs. Vane had told him ages ago about her husband's character.

He had a faint recollection that Colonel Vane was a spend-thrift, and weak; certainly his face looked rather weak.

"A temporary difficulty, eh?" Lawyers are accustomed to this sort of preface. "Let's see if I can help you out of it. Probably something to do with money."

It *had* something, everything, to do with money.

"I was foolish enough to put some funds into a rotten company a month ago—I mean a company that went smash," the colonel confessed.

"How much?"

"Fifty pounds."

"Come, now, that's not so bad. It might have been five hundred."

"It *is* five hundred; it mounts up to more than five hundred altogether," the colonel replied ruefully.

"Ah! how did that come about?" said the solicitor, taking off his gold-rimmed spectacles, wiping them, and putting them on again.

"I've been abroad for nearly twenty years," the colonel explained apologetically, "I had forgotten what sharks there are in the City, and I was induced by a swindler, who professed to deal in stocks and shares, to take five hundred shares in the Anaconda Reef and West Cutaway Gold Mine, at one pound a share. He explained that it was not at all necessary actually to pay the five hundred pounds; ten per cent. 'cover' was all he demanded. I paid the fifty, and now the gold mine

has burst up, the company's liquidators are asking him for the money, and he demands it from *me*."

"In spite of his contracting not to charge you with liability for the whole amount?" asked the able lawyer, leaning half out of his seat in surprise at the coolness of the proceeding.

"Here's the paper I signed." The colonel drew out of his pocket a document, and handed it to Mr. Betteridge. "I've read it over and over again—they sent it back to me to convince me I had put my foot in it—and it seems to me doubtful what it *does* mean. I thought I was protected from responsibility when I signed, but it appears to me uncertain now."

The solicitor began to read, and the colonel blew his nose violently to cover his state of mental anxiety as to what the verdict would be. In five minutes Uncle George looked up, handed the paper back, and said—

"It is quite clear."

"Well?"

"My dear sir, I am afraid what you said is true. You *have* put your foot in it."

There are moments when people feel too depressed even to swear. The colonel had arrived at such an unusual period in his own career.

"Yes," Mr. Betteridge proceeded, in a business-like but not unsympathetic tone, "the fellow is a cunning rascal, and has worded the document so cleverly that at first sight it appears to give anybody dealing with him absolute security, except as regards the amount of 'cover' actually deposited with him. That appearance is illusory, as you saw yourself on reading the words over carefully. You having promised to take five hundred pounds' worth of shares, liquidators are quite right if they look to you for payment of the whole of that amount."

"Then—then what am I to do?" Colonel Vane could hardly find breath to ask the question.

"That too is clear," Mr. Betteridge replied. "Pay the man the five hundred at once. As for his own commission, which I see he puts at eighty pounds—well, if I were you, I should offer him twenty, and see what he says. He may run you up to forty, but I doubt it. My advice is, send him a check for five two nought, and tell him the five hundred is for the

liquidators, the twenty for himself, and ask for a receipt by return. You see ? ”

“ But my dear sir, I—I am not in a position to send the fellow five two nought, as you put it.”

“ Indeed ? ”

“ I am on half-pay. A pretty large family, as I think you know. What I have saved abroad is vanishing as a result of living in Bayswater, in an expensive furnished house, for several months, doing nothing. It is positively out of my power to satisfy this —— fellow.” The colonel could not help the explosion at the end.

“ See if they will be content with an I.O.U.—a promise to pay in a month or so. Come to me again when you hear.”

Colonel Vane rose despondently to go.

Mr. Betteridge was at all times a man of business. It suddenly, however, occurred to him that Mrs. Vane had once said something about her husband being thick with Maturin.

“ Hem! Before you go,” he said, “ may I ask who persuaded or advised you to deal with this rascal ! ”

“ A friend of mine at the club.”

“ What Club ? ”

“ The Junior Portman.”

“ That is Maturin’s Club—one of them. Was it *he* who advised this speculation ? ”

It was the colonel’s turn to be rather surprised. He knew that Uncle George was a relation of Maturin’s. Why should he insinuate a charge against the doctor? Had they kept up the old feud—the details of which had completely passed from his not very retentive memory ?

“ No, It was not Maturin. A man in the Artillery—Colonel Power. I owe him a grudge, but I’ve every confidence in his integrity—every confidence.”

“ Sorry for you,” said the solicitor, shaking hands. “ Let me hear more about it.”

In his own heart he was surprised to find that Maturin, whom he had not seen for years, but against whom a fragment—a small fragment—of his old prejudice remained was *not* at the bottom of this new piece of mischief.

“ Mrs. Vane was a good, nice woman, I recollect,” said Uncle George to his table in strict confidence. “ I should be glad to help her husband out of this hobble. He hasn’t left

his address, or I would call." And he returned to his ordinary routine of work.

Now, the natural idea might be that Dr. Maturin had elaborately coached up Colonel Power to get Colonel Vane into these new toils. As a matter of fact, he had done nothing of the sort. He had simply found Colonel Power's enthusiasm for the Anaconda Reef, etc., Gold Mine, existing as a fact in nature, and he had utilized it. He had brought feather-brained Colonel Vane within reach of that enthusiasm, and had left his inherent gullibility to do the rest.

There was worry enough in the mind of the ex-consul without its being added to by this gratuitous trouble of his own invention. His wife saw, from certain unmistakable signs that she had long learned to recognize, that he was ill at ease—that, besides the weariness of waiting for the important official notice of a lucrative appointment which never came, he had some new and more exacting tribulation to endure. The news of Netta's false step in getting engaged to Dr. Maturin, however, turned such matters suddenly and completely out of Mrs. Vane's head. We have seen how she took the announcement; and without the loss of an hour she had attempted to enrol the colonel in the number of those who would do anything rather than allow the match to come off. In his own mind the colonel thought that, if his daughter really liked Maturin, there were alleviations in the idea of having a rich and generous son-in-law which might well be considered to compensate for any fancied shakiness of character—a subject on which he did not profess to be an expert.

Surely those who knew Colonel Vane best would have been least surprised if they had seen him, on the day following his wife's vigorous denunciation of the Maturin marriage, the very day which she was intending—as she herself informed him—to devote to "leaving no stone unturned" in her endeavor to make it impossible, sitting cheek by jowl with that amorous diplomatist in one of the deep windows of the Portman Club! He had telegraphed to Maturin to meet him there in the afternoon, and Maturin, thinking it might be as well to hear what the colonel had to say about the way in which Netta's engagement had been received at home, was early at the rendezvous.

"I can't for the life of me understand why your wife chooses to entertain such a very strong prejudice against me.

She may dislike me if she wishes; I don't want to marry her, but her daughter. But when it comes to systematically blackening one's character to other people, it is really carrying it rather too far," quoth the lover.

The colonel quite agreed. Was Dr. Maturin going to threaten an action for libel?

"You see, women do take prejudices," he remarked philosophically.

"I know they do," the doctor replied. He thought of a distinct prejudice taken against himself by his first wife, and which he had read in her eyes beyond all possibility of concealment. "But," he added, "they don't generally cling to them, with absolutely nothing to go upon by way of proof or reason, for twenty years, as your wife has done. I fancy she would be amenable to proper domestic influences."

"Not to mine," said the colonel.

Dr. Maturin shifted impatiently in his seat. If his future father-in-law was, in fact, a fool who could not exert authority in his own house, well, he could not alter nature.

"What does Mildred—your eldest girl—say to it? Does she support her mother's views?"

"I have not heard her say much."

"She must have said something or other when she first heard of our engagement.

"Yes, she seemed very surprised."

"Ha! Well, do you think she wanted to marry me herself, Vane?"

"Oh, not at all, not at all," the colonel responded, rather too eagerly, thinking what a conceited fellow this Maturin was.

"It occurred to me as possible," the doctor said, quite dispassionately, and without a shade of vanity in his voice.

"You telegraphed for me," he proceeded, as he changed his position so as to front the colonel; "you haven't yet told me what you wanted to say. I suppose it was not to enlighten me about your wife's views of my personal character, eh?"

"Not entirely," the colonel replied. It was his turn to feel embarrassed. "There was something I wanted to tell you about. You know Colonel Power—of this Club—don't you?"

"I know about him; I don't know him."

"Do you know he speculates a great deal?"

"Poor devil !"

"Hem ! Well, he's got some good ideas ; at least, he seems to have—attracts one, rather, you know. He's a great authority on mines, and all that."

"All what ?"

"Shares, stocks, you know, and companies—new companies."

"New companies aren't the same as mines."

The doctor was inclined to be cantankerous. His self-love was, of course, hurt at the knowledge of Mrs. Vane's hostility. He intended to drive a bargain with the colonel over the request for help which he foresaw was coming. He was not going to be too complacent to a prospective father-in-law who did not know how to muzzle a prospective mother-in-law who was inclined to make herself disagreeable.

"Well, you know more about such things than I do," the colonel replied, with an evident intention to avoid offence. "I should never have meddled with the business at all if I had not been a confounded jackass."

"You haven't told me what the business is yet."

"Power recommended me the Anaconda Reef Gold Mining Company as a perfectly safe speculation. He's a director—at least, he was—but the company has come to grief. He told me of a man—I fancy he called him an outside stockbroker ; out-and-out swindler would be more the name for him—who bought shares in mines and such things for people, and only charged them a small commission. You put in ten pounds' cover, you know, and that buys you a hundred pounds' worth of the stock. I dare say you understand."

"Oh, yes, quite well," Dr. Maturin answered dryly.

"It turned out a failure in my case. Power swore it was certain to turn up trumps, but it didn't."

"More like a mis-deal, eh ?"

"Yes. This fellow was a regular shark. I put in fifty pounds as 'cover,' and now I find it makes me liable to pay up five hundred. I've taken legal advice, and that's what it comes to."

Dr. Maturin laughed unfeelingly.

"Well, you can pay up, I suppose. Thank your stars it's not five thousand."

"How am I to pay up ?" the colonel asked gloomily.

"You managed to save, surely, when you were abroad."

Nothing much to spend your money on in Greece, is there?"

Oh, isn't there, though! You forget I considered my appointment safe, and never anticipated being treated so shabbily as I have been. And I had tremendous expense sending my boy home to be educated. And there's a good deal of society at Athens, you know." He felt inclined to add, "And there was repaying your loan," but did not. The colonel sighed as he thought of the pleasures of exile, once despised, but now more attractive. At Athens and Castro he had been free from money bothers at any rate.

"You must borrow, and pay back slowly."

"They charge such exorbitant interest. Where on earth am I to borrow? Who will trust a man without a post and without capital?"

"Nobody but an idiot, I should think." Dr. Maturin's tone was as unsympathetic as his words.

The colonel shifted on his seat. Was this all that Maturin felt disposed to do for him? He was startled by Maturin suddenly asking him a question on a totally different subject.

"And what is *your* opinion of the coming marriage between Netta and myself?"

"I have hardly had time to form an opinion yet, really."

"The sooner you do the better. I presume you don't share Mrs. Vane's prejudices?"

"Oh, of course not—not at all."

"You approve of our marriage?"

"If Netta is willing, I am perfectly satisfied." The colonel had the consciousness of acting rather nobly in taking his daughter's views into any account whatever, when it was obviously so much to his own advantage to marry her to a rich son-in-law.

"That's not cordial," said Dr. Maturin, reflectively; "but it will do. It's not the mother alone who can consent or object to a girl's engagement. The father has equal rights, moral rights, and I see you will exert yours in the common-sense direction—the direction of your daughter's own wishes. You see," he went on presently, "I can't lend you the money myself. You might let out the fact, and then scandal would fasten on it, and say you were selling your daughter to me. A nice thing for your wife to get hold of!"

"You can trust me not to chatter."

"Just what I can't do. But I can help you in another

way. Here, take my card; go to-morrow to this address. Dr. Maturin scribbled one on half a sheet of paper, and gave it to the colonel. "He's a man who does some business for me occasionally. To oblige me, he'll lend you the five hundred——"

"It must be five forty, to cover commission," Colonel Vane interjected anxiously.

"Five forty, then. He'll charge *you* only five per cent. for the loan. You can repay it by instalments." Dr. Maturin shut up his card-case. The colonel looked rather blue.

"But——" he was beginning.

"If you become my father-in-law, Vane—a rum idea to think of you as *my* father-in-law—it will, of course, become my duty, and my pleasure as well, to assist you further. And, after my marriage, I think I may promise you you won't hear anything more of this debt."

The colonel saw at once where the wind lay. Maturin was inclined to be generous—as a son-in-law.

"Thanks, thanks. It's uncommonly good of you," was all he could say.

"Yes, it is. But mind, if you are fool enough to talk about this matter to anybody, the person you've borrowed this money from to repay your debt is not I. It's the fellow whose name you've got on that card. And the promise I've made you, to see you through this business myself, is an honorable understanding, conditional on its not being told to a roul. You'll find me an uncommonly soft-hearted, generous fellow for a son-in-law, Vane."

The colloquy between the two men broke up. The colonel admired Maturin's generosity—he *was* really generous—and his astuteness as well. What harm was there in this kind of mutual understanding? It was an "honorable" understanding. Colonel Vane liked the expression; it acted as a sedative to conscience. Of course, he told himself, if Netta's heart had not been in this match, he would never had said a word to hasten it on. Now, however, he felt that it was a really desirable family connection.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MONEY MATTERS.

It was now three days since the engagement. Dr. Maturin had called every day. The first time, as we know, the Vane family "were not at home." The second he had an interview with Mrs. Vane alone; that was late in the afternoon of the day on which his talk with Colonel Vane took place at the club. He had found Netta's mother very obdurate and hard to move, so he had asked that Netta herself might be sent for. In this way he gained a sight of his beloved one, and at the same time had the delicious rapture of hearing her pleading with her parent to be allowed to give her heart to him. How *could* Mrs. Vane still refuse? But she did, and, until her consent was given, she insisted that nobody should, beyond their own family circle, be told anything whatever about Dr. Maturin's proposal; she declined to call it an engagement.

He was a lover who knew the value of persistence, and he called again the next afternoon. He was disappointed to find that Netta and her sister had gone over to the Betteridges, at Reigate, escorted by Mr. Robert Betteridge; the last place he would have wished them to visit, and the least eligible escort he could have imagined. He did not believe that Bob, whom he thought little of, was capable of posing as a rival to himself; still, he entertained a lover's usual jealousy. He found Mrs. Vane talking of leaving the Bayswater lodgings; she thought the seaside would be good for the girls. It was the sort of move he had expected. Dr. Maturin looked at the colonel, and the colonel said he could not really leave London at present; he might get a post any day, and he must be on the spot.

Mrs. Vane said that she did not believe in any post coming, and waiting could be done as well at Folkstone as in town.

Then the colonel altered his tactics, and argued that the *girls were enjoying themselves in London. They were hav-*

ing their Greek roughness rubbed off them, and going about in society—seeing the world, which must be a benefit to them. “For my part,” Dr. Maturin observed, “I consider life an odious necessity. But if Mrs. Vane would take the sensible view about this engagement, I should be content for you to go to any seaside place you like best; and, after our marriage, if London disagreed with Netta, of course there’s nothing now to tie me to it. Even when I re-enter Parliament, I can be away from town six months of the year.”

“It is ridiculous to talk of a marriage which may, and will, never come off,” Mrs. Vane replied.

Dr. Maturin smiled pleasantly.

“We should both wish, I am sure, to consult your feelings in every possible respect—except in this,” he said.

“You can only consult them by talking no more love-nonsense to Netta, who is a mere child.”

“My dear, my dear!” expostulated the colonel.

“Ah! you propose impossibilities, my dear madam.”

This interview had no more satisfactory termination than the last. But next morning three little parcels arrived at the family breakfast-table. They were from Dr. Maturin. Mrs. Vane’s present was a brooch studded with diamonds and emeralds. She put it down with a disdainful bang, only to hear Mildred’s tone of ecstasy as she said—

“Oh, look at this lovely bracelet! Simply perfect!”

It was indeed. If superb rubies set in massive gold could justify the adjective, these certainly did.

“Netta, what have *you* got?” the colonel inquired. “You keep very quiet over it.”

Now Netta, blushing, yet looking very pleased, had to produce her treasure, smaller and less pretentious than the others, but not less valuable in her eyes. It was an engagement ring, of chased gold, with one beautiful diamond; and inside the rim the poetical doctor had had engraved the single line, “It is enough I may but call thee mine.” In showing the ring to the others, Netta took care to hold it so that the inscription was not visible. That was too sacred to be anything but a secret between her lover and herself.

“Now, who can these trumpery things have come from?” the colonel asked mischievously. “It must be some mistake. Perhaps intended for the people next door. What do you say, Netta?”

The young lady addressed dexterously avoided a direct

answer by suddenly discovering that it was a shame her father was left out in the distribution. Why had nothing been sent to *him*?"

"Oh, men are supposed not to care for jewelry," the colonel replied. He thought in his own mind that he would get *his* reward from Dr. Maturin later on. And he did not feel perfectly comfortable in the thought. He had a tender feeling for his youngest daughter, and shrank from anything that looked in the smallest degree like bargaining about her—bartering away her future. A sudden prick of conscience now, coming unexpectedly while these exquisite presents were being delivered to his family, made him determine that on the first opportunity he would sound the girl as to her feelings, her real feelings, about her lover. He had no doubt she really loved him, and he could thus satisfy his conscience, and—not lose the money promised by Dr. Maturin! It was a way of killing two birds with one stone.

Further talk on the jewelry subject was prevented by morning callers. Mr. Bob Betteridge had found time to come and ask if the Miss Vanes had got home safely from Reigate, and whether they were much fatigued. And, having duly asked that question, he sat down with every apparent intention of staying. He was "on his way to the Yard," he asserted.

Mildred, who had reason to think that their recent visit to the East End had unsettled some of her sister's beliefs, at once began to talk rather disparagingly of Mr. Bastian. Bob warmly espoused his cause, and Netta, of course, joined in.

"I don't think his tendencies are quite right—though, of course, he is a good man," Mildred commented.

"But he doesn't tend anywhere," said Bob.

"He must tend—his doctrines must—in some direction."

"No, he has got to the end; he stays where he is."

This remark made Mr. Bastian still more mysterious than before to Mrs. Vane, who was listening. She would have pressed Bob for an explanation, only she had her own reasons for wishing to be conciliatory to him.

"Like other hermits," she remarked, "he seems vowed to celibacy."

"To what?" asked Netta, who had not quite heard.

"A blissful condition," struck in the colonel, humorously, "*in which there is no rent to speak of, and no children to educate.*"

"Thanks, papa; but I am not much wiser."

"It is the condition of men who live at clubs and do nothing," said Mrs. Vane, severely.

"It's not being married," said Mildred, more practically.

"Netta has been telling us extraordinary tales about him," Mrs. Vane observed to their caller. "He seems to believe that we are all to come back to this world, and live our lives over again when we're dead—some nonsense of that sort."

"God bless me!" the colonel interrupted. "Have this life all over again, eh?"

"No, no!" Netta exclaimed. She was sure *that* was not the theory.

"It would be another life altogether, he thinks," Bob explained.

"If I come back I hope I shall be given a little more money," the colonel remarked. "One ought to have promotion. I don't think I would accept a second edition of life at anything less than a field-marshal's pay."

"But you might not find yourself here at all," Netta said eagerly; "you might be in Mars, or Jupiter, or some distant planet, father, dear."

"Jupiter, eh? No Junior Portman in Jupiter, Netta, I expect."

There was general laughter at this practical observation, which encouraged the colonel to be flippant.

"Does your friend, Bob, believe in one's becoming a dog, or cat, or some other animal?"

"Oh, no! that's just what he doesn't believe. His view is—of course I don't know if it's true or not—that we may be reincarnated into a higher nature, or the same one; but not into a lower."

"Re-incarnated!" The term struck the colonel as strange. He would not expose his ignorance by asking for explanations. "A higher nature, eh? But, but Jove! shouldn't I feel out of my element?"

Mildred said demurely that she thought the whole theory needed a great deal of explanation before one could understand it. How had Mr. Betteridge managed to get away from Scotland Yard duties? She thought he was generally engaged till four o'clock in the afternoon.

"So I am," Bob said hastily. "That is—now and then I *get away sooner*, you know, or go later."

"Mr. Staunton said you practised at the bar with him once. Did not you like that better than—than what you do now? It seems such a noble profession."

"Perhaps it was where you came from—in Greece," was all that Bob could think of in reply.

"We weren't really in Greece; we were in a Turkish island. But it wasn't particularly noble there, I think."

Very far from it," said Mrs. Vane, whose principal recollection of the Mytilinean lawyers was that they spent their time in swindling buyers of land and in lending money at extortionate interest.

"But it is a grand profession," Mildred insisted. "Mr. Staunton says the law is the perfection of reason."

Bob felt bound, especially in Netta's presence, to defend himself from the implied attack.

"Look here, Miss Vane," he said. "Surely it's better for a fellow to take to something he likes, and is suited for, than to something isn't."

Netta felt inclined to clap her hands at this sudden attack on her sister's opinions, which she herself usually accepted as oracularly correct.

"But then," Mildred persisted, "doesn't it require a long training to become a lawyer. And then when you become something else all that money is thrown away."

"Oh, no! it's not thrown away," Bob replied cheerfully. "The Benchers of the Inn got some of it; Shanks got the rest."

"Who's Shanks?" Netta asked.

"Oh, he's Sir Arthur Cruickshank, now—a judge of the High Court," Bob explained. "I once read law with him. A hundred guineas a year for three years."

"Whew!" the colonel whistled. "But isn't it contempt of court, Bob, to call a judge Shanks?"

"Well, I'm not bound to take myself up, if it is," Bob rejoined.

"English law, Mr. Staunton says, is always on the side of the oppressed," Mildred proceeded dogmatically.

"It's on either side that pays it well enough," Bob replied, more practically.

Netta laughed admiringly. She did not know Bob could argue so logically. He had "shut up" her sister, she felt—no mean achievement.

Meanwhile Bob was thinking that Staunton had undoubt-

edly impressed Mildred, and was wishing gloomily that *he* could impress her sister in the same way. He heard Dr. Maturin's name mentioned. What chance had *he* against his clever brother-in-law?

It was after he had taken his departure, and other visitors had come and gone, that Mrs. Vane, in a quiet talk in the back dining-room with the colonel, suggested that Bob would make an excellent husband for Netta.

The idea had not occurred to the colonel before.

"Yes, he's rich." This was the first thing to be considered, in the colonel's view. "But, my dear, there's Maturin."

"You will never allow that, I hope," Mrs. Vane said emphatically. "You ought to forbid it decidedly."

"Then they would marry in spite of me."

"I wonder you don't see the advantage of getting her married to a young man who seems so steady and pleasant, and unobjectionable in every way, as young Mr. Betteridge," Mrs. Vane complained.

"I do see the advantage," the colonel admitted. "But I can't help it if she doesn't look at the thing in the same light."

"And these presents—they must be sent back, of course."

"That would mortally offend Maturin."

"Well, I shall refuse to accept mine. The girls must do as they think best."

And in the end Mrs. Vane did request Dr. Maturin to excuse her acceptance of the brooch—a refusal which the doctor took very philosophically, as he had foreseen it. Netta did *not* return her ring. Nor did Mildred feel bound to surrender her bracelet—though, in deference to her mother's views, she compromised by not wearing it for the present.

The colonel had received quite a new notion. He required time to think it over. Bob Betteridge to marry Netta instead of Maturin! Well, Bob was an excellent young, or rather young middle-aged man, and rich. (The colonel could not keep this recommendation out of his head. He did not even try.) Maturin would be furious if such a thing took place. Then where would his chance of paying his debt be? Well, Bob could afford five hundred pounds quite as easily as Maturin, if it came to that.

It was under the influence of these thoughts, and of his *intention*, previously mentioned, to sound Netta as to the

state of her affections as regarded Maturin, that the colonel took the opportunity to go a moon-light walk with his youngest daughter that same evening round an adjacent square. Most men cherish the pleasant illusion that they are born diplomatists. The colonel shared in this idea to the full. He began his conversation as follows.

"A pleasant fellow, Betteridge, I think, Netta?"

Netta assented.

"Chatty and sociable, and all that," the colonel proceeded.

"Yes. He's not half so stupid as I thought him when I first saw him," she remarked frankly.

"Stupid, my dear! Bob's not a bit stupid. You should have seen him when he was younger. He's young enough now, but he waw younger once, you know. In fact, we all were younger once, much younger. But, as I was saying, Bob was one of the cleaverest hands at making a book on the turf that I ever met. I mean——" The colonel would have attempted to correct himself, feeling that he had blundered in mentioning Bob's past escapades to his daughter; but she took him up promptly.

"Making a book, papa? Has Mr. Betteridge written any books?"

"Well, well, my dear, not exactly a book, as *you* understand the expression."

"Was it a pamphlet, then?"

"More of the nature of a pamphlet," the colonel replied vaguely.

"And did it give him fame—or money?" Netta asked.

"More money than fame, my dear. But I've forgotten about that. It was in the old days. Bob is an excellent fellow. Rich, too—very rich, or will be. And his employment is a very good one. I wish to goodness *I* could get anything like it."

"He seems very nice," said Netta, impartially. "But I don't think Hartas likes him at all."

"I know he used to admire Maturin once. I don't know if he does now," Colonel Vane remarked pensively.

"Everybody *must* admire Dr. Maturin," Netta said very emphatically.

"Yes, yes, my dear; so they must. I wanted to have a *little quiet talk* with you on that subject. Do you—a—do *you really and truly—a—like* Dr. Maturin?"

"Like him!" She stopped, and looked at her father with indignant surprise. Then she added, "I suppose mamma asked you to say that?"

"Not at all. I don't mean 'like,' of course. I mean, do you really—are you really sure that you would like to marry him? There!"

"I have *promised* to marry him, papa."

Colonel Vane was not obtuse enough to suppose that he was making a favorable impression. He did really desire his daughter's welfare very sincerely, and he also desired a release from the feeling that he was agreeing to her engagement on the strength of a bribe.

"My dear child," he said, with great feeling in his voice, "you don't know how important this is. Think; do think!" His tone was one of entreaty. "Do you really prefer him to anybody else in the world?"

His earnestness and evident anxiety had their effect. Netta paused in her walk, and tried to think. At all events, she allowed a minute to elapse before answering. At last she said—

"I think he is the greatest man I ever met."

This did not quite satisfy the colonel.

"Yes, but is he the best—the best for *you*?"

Another pause.

"He *is* the best—the best for me."

It was evidently all right, the colonel told himself. He was rejoiced to know it. He felt already as if his debt were paid. By one of those inexplicable impulses of frankness which made him at once popular and dangerous, Colonel Vane now experienced an irresistible tendency to let his daughter know about Maturin's generous promise. It was true that Maturin had asked him to keep the matter secret. But there was no harm in it. It was not a bargain disgraceful to himself, he felt, because his daughter did really love Maturin, and telling her was like telling Maturin himself; they would soon be one.

"My dear," he began, "I've got something to mention to you. Not important, you know, but rather amusing, and new. I'm sure you haven't heard it before. But you must not tell anybody else."

Netta agreed quite readily.

"Then, it's only this. I lately was foolish enough to *engage* in some money transactions, which you would not un-

derstand, and I lost over them. I lost five hundred pounds."

"Oh, papa!"

"Yes; but you don't know how generous Dr. Maturin has been. He told me not to tell anybody, but of course I can tell *you*. He has promised to pay the whole debt for me after his wedding—after he has married you."

Netta was silent. She was very much surprised. Then there crossed her mind the thought, "Is this an invention? Is my father trying to prejudice me against Hartas, as my mother has already done?" No; it must be true. She did not believe her father would grossly deceive her. It seemed strange of Hartas to promise that. Why did he not give the money at once? But then, she did not understand money matters, as her father had told her.

The colonel broke in on these thoughts.

"Almost looks as if I were selling you, eh, dear?" he said jocosely.

Some feeling which she could not control made Netta flush suddenly, and then say severely—

"Dr. Maturin is an honorable man. It is an insult to him to talk like that."

"Of course, it was a joke," the colonel explained. "It's exceedingly generous of him to make such a promise."

"Yes, is is," she rejoined. Still, in her own soul she wished that the debt and the promise had never existed.

If Mrs. Vane had known with what unconscious skill her husband was engaged, during that evening stroll, in undermining her younger daughter's belief in her lover, she would probably have thanked him cordially, and encouraged him to more diplomatic efforts. But she did not know it, and she regarded herself as the only person at all interested in securing Netta's happiness. It was in this persuasion that she dug out of some hidden corner of her writing-desk the long-unused address of Mr. George Betteridge, solicitor, in whose sympathy and knowledge she had once trusted implicitly, and wrote him a letter. It was a woman's letter, for it began with being strictly business-like, and ended by being human. It opened with a mere request for an interview at an early date, "to discuss a matter of much importance." Then, as Mrs. Vane's mind was brimful of one subject, she could not help a little of it running over on to her pen, and down her pen on to the paper; till at last she was *surprised to find* that she had filled four whole sheets, and

had laid a very fair summary of the case and of her objections to Dr. Maturin as a son-in-law before the lawyer.

Alas for her hopes! The lapse of years—what he would himself have called “the efflux of time”—had altered Mr. George Betteridge in many ways. The tender corner of his heart had grown harder, or it had been overgrown with a network of protecting weeds, which prevented its being easily probed. He had once, as we know, had the most real affection for his ill-fated niece, who married Dr. Maturin. He had failed to save her; he had even failed in proving that her husband was a villain; he had found his brother’s family hostile, and he had withdrawn sulkily into his shell. He had stayed in his shell for about twenty years, and was there now.

It was no more strange, therefore, that on receipt of Mrs. Vane’s epistle he should have felt bothered and worried, and not at all inclined to put himself out of the way to help, than that an animal loses the use of an organ which it has long ceased to employ. It must have disappointed the angels that Mr. George Betteridge should allow a worldly incrustation to gather over his naturally amiable and sympathetic nature, but so it was. He was older. He had done business so long that business seemed all to him. He still would have liked to prove Maturin a villain; but Maturin had become a politician of eminence, and Mr. Betteridge knew how hopeless it would be to expect that any success could attend the raking up of charges against so respected a citizen after such an interval of time. No, he would have liked to save his niece from Maturin’s clutches; but this new Janet, this Miss Vane—why, if she were fool enough to wish to marry the fellow, should she not do it? He would sternly decline to meddle in the concern.

And so he did. He wrote a polite but very practical and business-like letter, throwing cold water on Mrs. Vane’s wild idea that something could now be done to prove Maturin’s villainy. Even if suspicions once entertained (Uncle George was cautious, and did not admit that *he* had ever entertained them) were really well founded, no further evidence seemed to have been obtained in the number of years that had elapsed since Mrs. Maturin’s death; and Dr. Maturin, as Mrs. Vane must surely be aware, had won a reputation against which there did not appear to be the slightest stone-throwing in any direction. He, Mr. George Betteridge, made it a rule never

to interfere in the domestic quarrels of other people except in the usual legal way. He therefore saw little use in Mrs. Vane's coming to him, although—he was polite enough to add at the end of his communication—he would, of course, be glad to renew his acquaintance with her, which had been dropped for so long a time. He did not think it necessary to add that he had already done some business for Mrs. Vane's husband.

The receipt of this letter did not quite crush Mrs. Vane's hopes, but it bitterly disappointed her. Somehow she had counted on Uncle George. She cherished the memory of him as a very kindly-hearted, sympathetic man for a lawyer; and now he had snubbed her, as she once upon a time had been obliged to snub him. And his reasoning was so good and unimpeachable. That made it seem even more offensive. Perhaps they had both been wrong in thinking ill of Dr. Maturin. Why Mr. Betteridge, solicitor, did not seem even to admit that he *had* ever thought ill of him! What hypocrites, or what cowards, men were! It was a morose, pessimistic conclusion for good, kind-hearted Mrs. Vane to arrive at; but her depression of spirits, as she felt the net of this marriage closing around her, might well excuse her for harboring even worse thoughts.

CHAPTER XXX.

EASTWARD HO!

It was not that Mrs. Vane approved more than before of the engagement. But we know that Uncle George's refusal to interfere checkmated her. And Dr. Maturin was gradually winning his way, by quiet persistence. He was fully conscious of the wisdom of an early introduction, into any business in which he was engaged, of the thin end of the wedge. He had first accompanied Miss Netta Vane a hundred yards, from their lodgings to a shop, without open objection. A few days later he advanced to a permitted escort of his beloved one for a quarter of an hour in the park, on the plea that she looked as if she needed fresh air. It was becoming *quite a recognized custom* in the Bayswater lodgings for

Netta to have five minutes in the drawing-room alone with her lover before Mrs. Vane came into the room. This was the period when the course of Dr. Maturin's true love ran at its smoothest. He was congratulating himself on the quietude of the current, and imagining that rocks and rapids were past.

Nobody, therefore, could be very much surprised that when Miss Netta expressed to Dr. Maturin her strong wish to introduce him to the mysterious East End worker, who had made such an impression on herself, and when the doctor said that there was no need to take Mildred or anybody else with them; they could go alone—surely she was not afraid to go anywhere with *him*?—the girl replied submissively that she would do as he pleased. She did not feel now that she was bound first to consult her mother, as her mother had tacitly permitted previous excursions in her lover's company. But did Dr. Maturin—No, certainly not Dr. Maturin, he protested. Well, did *Hartas*—really like going alone with her; would he not be bored? She was an unintellectual companion, she feared. It is needless to repeat the amorous doctor's earnest remonstrances at this doubt; he would be content to see nobody but Netta Vane for the rest of his days. As for this Mr. Bastian, well, as she particularly desired it, he would make the pilgrimage to his shrine. But he gave her frankly to understand that his, Bastian's, arguments would probably have no effect on his own case-hardened intellect.

"Perhaps he will gain an influence even over *your* strong mind," Netta said.

"You are wrong in thinking me strong-minded," he replied. "In reality I have a nervous and impressionable nature."

Netta laughed incredulously.

"Just think what an impression *you* have made on me," he said, by way of proof.

As they drove one afternoon eastward in pursuance of their agreement, his companion said rather seriously—

"Now, Hartas, do you want to please me?"

"Darling! of course;" and he pressed her daintily gloved hand.

"Then listen to what this man says, and don't scoff."

"I won't," said Dr. Maturin, humbly.

At the same time, he wondered still more who on earth this apostle of modern mysticism could be, and what sort of a

sermon he would be treated to. It would be hard to sit silent while the fellow preached at him. Still, he thought he could stand one afternoon of it, for Netta's sake. He felt the power of Netta's own sermons; they were short, and doubly sweet as coming from her lips. But he knew he was still unregenerate enough to object to any other moral guide.

The drive was uneventful. Janet shivered in the dull coldness of this English day. How different the London she had dreamed of and longed to see was from the reality—the huge, squalid reality! The East End was a revelation.

Dr. Maturin pressed her hand and whispered. "Wait till we are married, darling. I will take you out of this den. We will go to islands of the blest, tropic paradises, 'steeped in summer sunshine' all the year round."

"I would rather live among these poor people, if I could, and try to help them, as he does," she replied.

The doctor's protests against such an idea were eloquent. She could be the good angel of the poor without living in the slums. She *should* be their good angel. She should have her own way in doing devoted charitable deeds, when they were married.

The appearance of a carriage in Bastian's street was evidently an occurrence of some importance in the eyes of the inhabitants. When Dr. Maturin and Netta entered the room, they were surprised to find it partially darkened. But Bastian was there, and rose at once from a sofa, where he had been resting, to welcome his guests.

"I told you I should try and get Dr. Maturin to come and see you, Mr. Bastian," Netta said, in her sweetest tones; "and now I have brought him."

It would have been more polite to have said that Dr. Maturin wished to be introduced to Mr. Bastian of his own accord; but Miss Vane was not mistress of politic fictions, and rejected conventional lying with horror. It flashed across Bastian's mind that it was rather strange this young girl should be alone with this gentleman, driving about London. Was he so old as to act as her guardian? Or was it a relic of Greek life? Meanwhile, he shook hands cordially with Netta, and bowed to Dr. Maturin. Then he looked at him.

Dr. Maturin was, as usual, entirely at his ease.

"I am afraid I have chosen a bad time for our visit," he remarked. "Mr. Bastian, you see," he said, turning to

her, "is not well. I fear he has been injured, and was resting."

"Injured!" Netta became conscious for the first time of the fact, which the semi-darkness had prevented her noticing before, that their host was looking exceedingly pale—paler even than his wont; also that he had his right arm in a sling.

"Oh, I *am* so sorry! How did you hurt yourself. Shall we go?" The sentences ran into and jostled over each other in her eager sympathy.

"Go! Why should you? Not at all." He had motioned them into seats, and had himself sunk back on to the sofa. "I am weak, that is all. And this arm—it's nothing; only broken. It will soon mend."

"A broken arm is something," said Dr. Maturin.

"How—how did it happen?" his companion asked.

"A slight tussle with the powers of darkness, Miss Vane."

"The powers of darkness—oh!"

"Decidedly a little deranged," was Dr. Maturin's inward comment.

"Yes," Bastian proceeded coolly. The subject did not seem to interest him. "Now and then life about here does mean hard knocks—that is, if one is not content to stand by and let brutes act brutishly; or, rather, to let the brutal part conquer the spiritual. Did you drive all the way from the West End?"

The question was abrupt. It was addressed to Dr. Maturin.

"Dr. Maturin has come farther than that to-day. He has come all the way from Manor End," Netta explained. "I told him something of what you said to us when we visited you last. About the soul, I mean—and re-incarnation."

"Indeed! And what does Dr. Maturin think of the soul?"

It was a strange question, and not asked directly of him, but rather addressed to the young girl sitting near him.

"I know what Milton has said," the ready doctor at once answered for himself, "that

" ' Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep ; "

and though I cannot say I believe in the doctrine, I came here to listen and receive enlightenment, sir. I am a novice seeking truth."

Again Bastian fixed his gaze intently on Dr. Maturin's

face. For fully a minute the men sat thus facing each other in uncomfortable silence.

Netta was rather dismayed. She had thought the man they had come to call upon always talked as readily as he had done at that impressive afternoon visit. But he did not seem at all inclined to spread his mental wealth out for Dr. Maturin's inspection. This compelled Dr. Maturin to talk himself, which he did with the uncomfortable consciousness that their host was staring at him with those deep-set eyes he could not see the color of, because of the gloom, but which he knew were of piercing quality.

"Browning has some lines which seem to express the belief in a number of worlds which the soul is supposed to touch at before reaching heaven or hell," he said. "You know, when Evelyn Hope is dead, he tells her dead body, or rather her spirit, that.

" 'The time will come for clasping you,
Through worlds I must traverse, not a few.'

I always thought the Pythagorean idea of men's souls entering the bodies of animals after death was a fantastic one."

"You don't believe *that*?" Netta asked Bastian, rather anxiously.

"No. It was a natural mistake of the time in which the doctrine was promulgated. The Pythagoreans saw that some men were rapacious and cruel and sensual, and placed their souls in the bodies of kites and wolves and swine; but, as I have always said, it is better to believe even that than to consider that the soul at death dies altogether. That is a bestial doctrine."

"It is somewhat bestial. But then, if men are really beasts, and no more?" Dr. Maturin forgot for the moment his intention to avoid controversy. He felt he had made a mistake, as he saw Netta's eyes turned on him in momentary mute remonstrance. "Confound the girl!" his self-will at once took shape in unspoken words, "to bring him to a den where a fool talked nonsense, and a wise man might not answer him except on pain of losing the regard of the girl he loved." But at least he could show the flaws in this metempsychosis theory. He did not suppose Netta was yet a real believer in *that*.

"Of course," he remarked hastily, "I admit the beauty

of the notion, true or not, that souls live again in other bodies as a means of progressive purification."

Bastian was silent. Dr. Maturin went on undaunted.

"I have heard—in fact, every educated person, I suppose, has heard—of your theory, or at least of something very like it. It was always seemed to me that if it is true it involves great waste of power." His companion was still silent. "Shall I tell you what I mean exactly?"

"If it pleases you."

The doctor laughed. "Well, what I think is this. How much better it would be if the soul, every time it entered a fresh human body, remembered everything of value which it had acquired in a former existence. Suppose, for instance, that at the age of sixteen it were the common, ordinary experience that a human being suddenly woke to the consciousness, not only that it had had a former life, but also of what it had acquired of mental and moral excellence in that life. In that way we should go on accumulating knowledge of all kinds. Death would not come as a wet sponge to all our endeavor and achievement. I know Wordsworth says we have 'intimations of immortality,' of an immortal past, in childhood; but that these fade away as men advance in life. That would mean, if true, that when a person was of too tender an age to utilize the assurance of pre-existence, he had that assurance, but that when his faculties fitted him to build on former superstructures, laid in other lives and perhaps other worlds, the whole fabric vanishes. I think there may be something in your doctrine. But if previous existences are a fact, why do we carry with us into our second life nothing of what we have learned in our first life? Why do we not even feel in the least degree sure that there was a first life at all?" He was talking well, in his best House of Commons manner. Netta felt extremely proud of him.

There was a tone of well-simulated eagerness about Dr. Maturin's words as he finished. Bastian again turned his eyes on to the speaker's eyes, and seemed to be examining his face—looking through into his spirit; there was such a searching, far-off look in them. At last he diverted his gaze on to the tiny petals of a fuchsia on the table. He was obliged to answer, though he had an instinct that his seed would fall on stony ground.

"I avoid this language of controversy when I can," he said. "You don't know how utterly immaterial it seems

to me what you or any other human being happens to think truth. I know what I know. You seem to me like a person arguing against the existence of a gold mine, which all the time I am delving in daily. I might laugh at the unbelief of the uninitiated, if I stayed to contemplate it; but I prefer to pass it by. It was the same with me once. I was looking for the gold mine in all directions but the right. I was buried in a mass of doubts, ignorances, fears, prejudices. In fact, I was as you are now."

"That's not complimentary."

"It is not intended to be. But I will answer what you said just now, because I am never tired of dwelling on the glories of my past and of my future, and it seems to me as plain why we are not permitted to carry with us our knowledge into new existences, as why the leaves fall in autumn and are replaced by fresh buds in the spring. I can only put you into the right path. It is for you to follow it up. Trust me, all the pleasures and profits of ordinary earth-life sink into absolute nothingness when one has found that true path, and walked in it for a time, and become aware of the realities of nature, and of the magnificent destiny here and hereafter awaiting the souls of the purified. You are at least an educated man. You can understand and appreciate, even if you do not believe. And I speak even more for Miss Vane's profit. I see in her a soul apt to learn and worthy of being taught."

Netta blushed at the compliment. Dr. Maturin objurgated the fellow's impudence in his heart.

"One reason," he went on, addressing his words to Netta, "why re-incarnation brings with it oblivion of the past is because human souls do not purify themselves sufficiently; if they did, they would know, as I know, for certain that they have lived before. But even the purified do not remember the *details* of their past—all that is a blank, which no striving will ever enable us to fill up; it is not permitted. What is the cause, you may ask? On a fine spring day you feel that you, like the world of nature, are born again; all is fresh, around you and in your own heart. Why? Because you have passed through winter; because of the blank behind you. Let me give you another illustration. You change your place of living. At first all the streets, if it is a town, all the lanes and fields, if it is the country, strike you as *interesting* and picturesque, because new. A year after, you

think it all stale and ugly. Such is the power over us, the subduing charm, of novelty. Well, if each fresh life came only as one in a recognized series, do you think we should be so impressed with life's grandeur, its beauty? would not *it* lose its charm too? And we should have much of the motive to exertion taken away; we should think, 'I have numbers of existences in which to live, I need not trouble about this one.' I am speaking of the average men, for whom it would not be good to be initiated into real truth."

"Life is stale enough as it is, sometimes," Dr. Maturin replied. "It certainly does not want what small amount of interest it possesses lessened."

Without answering the remark, Bastian proceeded.

"And there is this thought, besides. What is really valuable in man's acquisition of knowledge while on this earth is the moral knowledge he gains; the experience of his lowliness, the effort to rise. Intellectual knowledge is nothing—often, indeed, worse than nothing, for it blinds and misleads. Well, this worthless kind of knowledge is *not* carried on to future lives; but the moral is. Our spirits are better in each new life for their trials in the old. And it is beautifully ordained that only to the best and brightest spirits, those really capable of bearing the blinding blaze of truth without having the eye of the soul scorched by it, comes its impression, deepening self-renunciation into conviction and certainty that this life is only one stage on a long, long journey to perfection."

He was silent, and Netta did not speak. Dr. Maturin said—

"These ideas are picturesque." (He really thought them so.) "You know that most barbarous races place their home of souls in the west, towards the setting sun. This is typical of the general delusion of soul-fanatics, spiritualists—supposing, I mean, that they *are* deluded, and that their views are wrong. If they were to follow the setting sun westward as far as it went, they would come back to where they stand. It would be a real 'argument in a circle.' They don't know, however, that the earth is round. Perhaps it is better for them not to know it—not to know that the soul is homeless."

"*You* don't believe the soul is homeless, Hartas," she whispered.

Dr. Maturin was in his usual state—of believing little; and

that little was a recent accretion, due to Netta's influence. Bastian's doctrine, had sounded to him at first odd, then rather beautiful; but it was inevitable that, from his man-of-the-world point of view, the claim of higher spiritual status must sound conceited. Conceit means weakness, and because Dr. Maturin thought Bastian conceited he felt rather more at ease with him.

"You take children from the slums into the country sometimes, I think?" he asked, rather abruptly.

"Yes, a few."

"Oh, Mr. Bastian!" Netta exclaimed. I heard from Mr. Staunton you were always doing it."

"I have a cottage, and find it useful for conversion into a convalescent home now and then. It is on the hills, in good air," he explained.

"That is an object I sympathize with most heartily," said the doctor.

"Dr. Maturin has been exceedingly generous to the poor himself," Netta felt constrained to remark. She was afraid their host was undervaluing her hero. He could not know how good and kind he really was. "He is constantly sending those who need fresh air out of London. He has given a whole park, too."

Bastian seemed curiously uninterested in the information. He said "Yes?" in a mechanical way. Meanwhile he was again wondering what were the relations between his visitors. Why did Miss Vane think it necessary to praise Dr. Maturin to his face? And why did the doctor allow her to do so, and, indeed, appear to take it quite as a matter of course? He became strangely silent. Netta asked him a question, and he returned no answer. Not liking to disturb his reverie, she said in low tones to Dr. Maturin—

"I wish I could think that the doctrine was the same as the one I have always been taught. I don't know whether it is Christian or not."

"It goes dead against orthodox Christianity," the doctor said decidedly, as if he were an authority on such subjects.

"Do you think so? I was afraid of that. I don't think Mr. Bastian would preach it if he did not reconcile it with the Bible in his own mind. And the last time we were here, he quoted a number of passages in Scripture, which seemed to confirm his theory."

"Here is another quotation for you, darling," Dr. Maturin

whispered. "The devil can quote Scripture to his purpose." He thought the remark a rather telling one likely to produce an impression on a girl. He was rather surprised at the immediate practical application of it by Netta, who answered, in a shocked voice—

"Mr. Bastian is not a devil, Hartas."

Whether Mr. Bastian was or was not diabolical, he had recovered from his reverie or trance, or whatever it was, and his first remark made Dr. Maturin seriously think that there might be something Satanic in his composition. For he leaned forward in his chair, gazing eagerly into Netta's face, and said—

"You call this man Hartas. Is he a cousin or any relative?"

She blushed deeply, and said, "No."

"Between your two souls," Bastian went on, after a momentary pause, "I see a great gulf fixed." He passed his hand once or twice wearily over his forehead; his eyes were closed. "There is something dark—something that separates."

"What do you mean?" Dr. Maturin interposed, in peremptory tones.

"Your spirit and that of this woman are essentially hateful to each other."

Dr. Maturin laughed scornfully. Netta had turned pale, partly with surprise, partly indignation. She rose from her seat, and, going close to Hartas Maturin, took his hand in hers. Then she said—

"Mr. Bastian, it is a secret, which we are not allowed to tell anybody yet; Dr. Maturin and I are engaged to be married."

"I knew that when you said you were not related," Bastian remarked quietly. "But there are powers stronger than your two wills, and in my heart I believe this marriage will never take place."

Netta clasped Dr. Maturin's hand tighter. It seemed for a moment as if some demon were trying to tear them asunder. As for Dr. Maturin, he sat stolidly in his seat, unmoved, with a cynical smile on his face.

"You should avoid prophesying unless you know," he said lightly and disdainfully, addressing their host.

"There are facts which may be visible to others, and which you cannot yourselves see," Bastian replied, without a

shade of irritation in his voice. Think, Dr. Maturin, think! Cast your glance over your past, known to yourself better than to me. Is there no soul visible on that area, that has now passed out of life, but which during earth-life had reason to feel terror at your presence? Perhaps—excuse me, I am not now speaking according to polite convention—you may have wronged somebody long ago, very likely unconsciously; very possibly you repented of it afterwards with bitter tears; but was there no such person whose soul at all resembled the soul of this young lady as we now see her?"

Dr. Maturin's nerves, as we know, though delicately sensitive, were firmly strung. Yet he could not help a heart-leap of terror at these words. The only sign he gave that he was moved was the rigid clasping of his chair-arms in his hands, and a staring, defiant fixity in his eyes.

"I know nothing of her soul," he at length gathered control enough to say, "except that it is angelic."

"Ah! That soul of hers has inhabited other bodies," Bastian went on remorselessly. He rose slowly, and stood looking down into Dr. Maturin's pallid upturned face. "Do you recognize it?"

"Recognize it! How can I?"

"Easily. Soul speaks through character. In your mind's gallery of portraits, is there nobody whose character once resembled Miss Janet Vane's?"

Dr. Maturin turned to look at Netta herself. There was an unspeakable anxiety in his face. He was fearing that she too might have the same uncanny thoughts as he had; that she too might have applied this terrible mystic's words as he had done, to his dead first wife. But he saw in Netta's face that which partly restored his confidence. She was not looking at him suspiciously, doubtfully. There was love in her glance as she returned his look; there was white indignation of Bastian written on her cheeks. Yes, that was the right cue. Yet he had been terribly shaken. An explosion would do him good; it would be an outlet for the passions seething within him.

"Sir," he almost shouted—he too had risen, and faced Bastian across the table in the little room—"you have presumed shamefully on your position. You have brought us here, and—I know not with what motive, personal or otherwise—you have done your best to sow discord between us. Depend upon it, you will gain nothing by such tricks. Every

imposter can pretend to read futurity. You improve on the practice, for you profess to know something—it is rather vague information, certainly, that you supply—of the past as well as the future. If you are honest, my advice to you is this—stick to your work among the poor, and don't meddle with the love-affairs of other men. If you do, there is a law of slander, and you will repent it." His words were uttered with an appearance of bravery. At his heart Dr. Maturin still felt that shock. He wanted, above all, to get away, to examine the position in quiet. Was the fellow a real magician? But surely his lifelong disbelief in humbug was not now to be overturned.

As for poor Netta, she was too much upset by the disastrous ending of her plan of bringing these two men together, to have any very distinct thoughts just then. She was angry with their entertainer, as was natural. She felt that an attack had been made on Hartas, and through him on herself, and she sympathized with his defiance. Here was a new friend whom she seemed really to trust, and he too, like her mother, like nearly everybody, opposed her engagement!

Not a granite cliff could have been less moved by Dr. Maturin's bluster than Bastian himself. At the end of his menacing speech, he turned his head away and sighed. Then he seemed suddenly to realize Netta's presence, for he gazed curiously at her, and murmured—

"Poor child!"

"Thank you, Mr. Bastian," she replied, with dignity. "I do not need your sympathy."

"You do, more than you think. You are entangled. There is something even now overhanging you. Who knows?—a shock may reveal to you the past history of your spirit better than I can do, as people drowning see their whole life in a flash. You do not like my words? I did not speak them to please. What I said of the separation between your two souls is true. The truth is not always pleasant."

"Come along, Netta dear," Dr. Maturin said impatiently, opening the door. "These are the ravings of lunacy—or of imposture. I decline to listen any longer."

Together they left the house, and walked to where the carriage was awaiting them at the end of the street.

"To take the taste of that out of our mouths, let us go up to Manor End—to Free mantle House, darling, for a few hours. It is hardly out of our way. I cannot trust you to

your mother yet. *She* may succeed in the noble object which this quack seems also to have set before himself, and which appears to have fascination for many minds—destroying our happiness, and tearing us away from each other.”

“They will not succeed,” Netta murmured. She sank back exhausted, and hardly knew whither the swift wheels were carrying them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN AWKWARD ACCIDENT.

IN the carriage Dr. Maturin had an opportunity for thinking of Bastian's words, as Netta seemed too tired to speak. The only sign she gave of her presence was that she held the doctor's hand in her own, and now and then pressed it. Dr. Maturin was not ungrateful for this mark of affection. He thought it an excellent trait in women that they resented attacks on those they loved. Meanwhile, as they traversed the dingy streets in the lateness of a summer afternoon, he was, like Sir Bedivere, “revolving many memories.”

He tried to explain the apparent insight into his own past which Bastian had displayed on strictly practical and business-like principles. He altogether declined to admit in his own mind that there was any truth in the idea, that some souls were better gifted than others to read character and detect spiritual secrets. Also the doctrine of the transfer of souls, which the mystic taught and evidently believed he still rejected as an old wife's tale. Yet the conversation, brief as it was, with its unexpected ending, had changed his mental attitude towards both these theories. Before, it would have been an enormous effort for him even to think of them as possibly correct; now he found himself wishing to be able to devise arguments which would conclusively prove them to be fallacies.

He admitted to himself that, as regards Netta Vane's character, Bastian had hit on the truth when he described it as resembling that of a person whom he had wrouged long ago. “Somebody who in earth-life had reason to regard him *with terror*,” the “quack” had said. Was that a mere happy guess? But how strange that he should conjecture anything

an grossly improbable as that *he*, the esteemed and philanthropical, should ever have been an object of fear to any human being !

Dr. Maturin glanced in thought for a moment at the possibility that Bob Betteridge, who was aware of the prejudice against him entertained by Uncle George and Mrs. Vane, might have set Bastian on to say what he did, as a means of testing the accuracy of those old suspicions. Or perhaps Mrs. Vane herself had been the instigator, or Bob wanted to marry Netta Vane himself, and thought that by sowing distrust in her woman's mind he could estrange her from her lover. No, it was not a tenable theory ; for Maturin looked on Bob as honorable, if flighty. Yet it was quite possible that Bastian might have heard something about his first wife's death which had set him speculating. And, as moralists were usually uncharitable, he had very likely flown to the conclusion that the death was a murder, or suicide induced by bad treatment. What more natural, or more abominably ungentlemanly, than to see what effect a hint of that kind would have on Dr. Maturin ?

"He thought I was the same sort of fool as he usually practises on," the doctor said to himself. "Fortunately, I think I kept my composure pretty well."

The theory, if it did not entirely satisfy, at least comforted him. His fear was not of Bastian's powers of detection, though these had startled him, but of any effect which his words might produce on Netta's mind. The "powers of darkness," Bastian had spoken of. He was trying to use *them*, to enlist *them*, against his—Dr. Maturin's—happiness in his love ; against his redemption and reformation by a noble woman ;—so, in his better moments, the doctor thought of the position. Well, neither natural nor supernatural forces would succeed in wresting Netta from his grasp.

They had now been driving for almost an hour, and Dr. Maturin knew that they must have nearly reached his house. He really did not wish Netta to return home after hearing those prophesies of gloom, without any interval for recovering from the effects. The doctor recognized that Bastian had a strong personal influence ; he disliked him all the more for it. No doubt she required an antidote to be administered, in the shape of rest and quiet talk with another strong personality—namely, himself. His object in taking her to Freemantle House was that he might be able to administer the antidote

—to banish Bastian and his croakings from her mind, to regain his old ascendancy over her. But he must not keep her long, for it began to dawn on him that this excursion to Manor End late in the afternoon was perhaps hardly consistent with the rules of strict propriety. He told the coachman, irritably, to drive faster. After an hour's rest in his drawing-room, so soon to be her own, he would convoy her back to Bayswater, where he reflected, with some perturbation, that Mrs. Vane might be even now expecting her return.

She had begun to talk a little now. Excited as she still was, she forgot about the hour, or the probability that in the cosy West End lodgings her mother might be wondering where she lingered. Her thoughts were busy with enigmas. Why had Bastian turned against her? What did his curious words mean? Her soul had lived before—but where, when? He was an enemy of her lover, so he *must* be wicked—no, but at all events mistaken; and until here pented and acknowledged Hartas to be the best and greatest man that ever existed, she told herself that she would never forgive him, she would never see him again.

They were proceeding at a funeral rate now. Was it uphill? The doctor saw nothing that impeded progress on his side, and was just about angrily to apostrophize his coachman again, when Netta stopped him.

"They have dug up the road this side, dear; I think there is only room for one carriage at a time."

It was true. Gas-pipes were being laid down along the roadway, and great holes gaped, leaving only room for a single line of vehicles. There was a lumbering cart in front of them, and they had to suit their pace to it. Dr. Maturin could hardly help swearing. He was impatient, but so also were the people who had been kept waiting at the farther end of the road, and who were anxiously expecting the tide to turn, and the policeman in charge to give *them* the signal to start. As it happened, Dr. Maturin's carriage was the last of the string going towards the village; and at the end of the excavations, where the road regained its natural width, a brewer's dray was already slowly advancing. The man in charge of it was too impatient to notice how little room he was giving the doctor's carriage to round the corner of the pipe-holes and get into the broad; and in a moment there was a crash and jar, and Netta felt herself being lifted bodily up

in her vehicle, and then a terrific bump followed. She was conscious of nothing more.

The carriage had fallen half in and half out of the trench in the road. Two wheels were hanging in the air; above them the body of the vehicle made a wooden bridge across the gap, a bridge shaped like an inverted letter V. At the moment of the upsetting of his carriage, Dr. Maturin was thrown violently towards the opposite side, and his body came in contact with the wood-work. His head was not injured, and he was able very soon to call, "Netta! Netta!" and then, as no answer came, to add imploringly, "Speak, darling! You are not hurt, are you?" Groping with his hands, he found the corner where she had been sitting, and he was horrified to notice that her body seemed heavy and motionless. He managed to protrude his head out of the upper window, and several hands helped him on to the road.

"Help her! There is another person in there!" he shouted, pointing to the wreck of his carriage.

It was a difficult work getting anybody out of such a place. Poor Netta was gathered in a heap at the lowest angle of the vehicle, and was still insensible. The moment she was brought by willing arms through the shattered doorway, Dr. Maturin ordered her to be placed on the bank. Ah! how anxiously he felt her heart and pulse! She was breathing; and he was inexpressibly relieved to discover the fact. But her head had evidently been cut, for blood was flowing from a slight wound beneath her bonnet. Her face was partly covered with blood, and her eyes were closed. A deathly pallor overspread her cheeks. The doctor groaned inwardly.

A man brought some water in a pail. Dr. Maturin with his own hands bathed her face: then he asked one of the ring of bystanders to fetch brandy, quick!

As he looked up from the form over which he had been bending, a voice said—

"Why, it's Dr. Maturin, sure!"

And the news soon spread that Dr. Maturin's carriage had been overturned. There were offers of assistance enough now.

"Shall we take the lady into the hotel, sir?" a man who seemed the landlord asked deferentially. Dr. Maturin first glanced at the hotel; it was a roadside beer-house, and he *declined without thanks*.

"Here, some of you!" he cried, leaping to his feet, "carry this lady up to my house—Freemantle House. It's only a couple of hundred yards. And tell Dr. Snow to come in there at once."

They brought a rough shutter, and were going to lift Netta's inanimate form on to that. Dr. Maturin ordered cushions, a mattress, pillows—anything. A very respectable make-believe of an ambulance litter was soon extemporized, and a procession set off for the house, the coachman being left in charge of the ruins of the carriage. Meanwhile, the dray which had caused the accident had been permitted to go on its penitent way, after its owner's name had been taken.

Dr. Maturin walked beside the litter, and every now and then felt the patient's pulse. He had given a little brandy and water, but was afraid to give more, until sensibility returned. He had a horrible dread at his heart lest some injury had been done to the brain or spine; he knew what that meant. He had time, as they bore his precious burden up the hill, to curse himself for this ill-starred expedition to Manor End. The whole day had been one of mishap. That vile East End quack was at the bottom of it all. Dr. Maturin positively stamped his foot with rage as he thought of how Bastian would gloat over this fulfilment of his prediction that "something" was impending. Was *this* the gulf that was to separate his soul and Netta's? He did not believe she could be very badly hurt. She had not been thrown from the carriage; the carriage had merely fallen heavily on its side. No; his darling would soon come to her senses. She would recover from the shock with the power of youth to triumph over illness; then half-mystical prophecies would be proved impudent lies.

They had proceeded slowly, so that when the porch of the house was reached, it was no surprise to Dr. Maturin to see Dr. Snow waiting to receive them.

"An accident?" asked that now prosperous and rubicund practitioner, with as much sorrow in his voice as he could impart in prospect of an interesting and profitable case. "Dear! dear!"

"Upset in a carriage," Dr. Maturin explained. "Look at her, Snow! It was a quarter of an hour ago, and she has *not* spoken or given a sign yet. Tell me, man, what you *think*!"

His impetuous tones rather astonished placid Dr. Snow, who, however, proceeded to make a brief examination in the light of the lamp swinging from the porch.

"I should say, a case of concussion of the brain," he said, a moment or two later; "but it is impossible to pronounce without further examination."

"Up stairs at once. The best bedroom; take her there," Dr. Maturin ordered.

Dr. Snow, however, interposed.

"Is that wise, Maturin?" In these cases the less moving about the better. I was afraid it might be concussion, and I took the liberty of going into your surgery—your professional room—and the sofa there is the best place for her at present, I feel sure. It's on the ground floor, you see, and ——"

"Yes, yes!" Dr. Maturin interrupted hastily. "For God's sake, let us make haste."

We know already how the consulting-room at Freemantle House was situated as regards the rest of the apartments. The door of the passage was open; through that the litter passed, and, after traversing the length of the passage, was turned slowly and with some difficulty so as to pass through the doorway of Dr. Maturin's medical sanctum—a room in which other events had happened before.

It was the last room in the house, probably, to which the doctor would have had Netta taken in the natural course of things. His artistic sense would have revolted against the shockingly bad taste of bringing her into any kind of relationship to the mouldering relics of an old tragedy. He would not have allowed her image to be blurred in his imagination by any association with horrors. He intended not only to guard her life from all things disagreeable, but to guard himself also from any danger of mixing up this womanly perfection with the imperfections of his past career. Now, however, his mind was in the present, absorbed by the need of the passing moment, and he hardly even noticed where the litter was being carried to. His feelings were concentrated in passionate love, in burning anxiety, which left no room for the play of memory, and none for considerations of sentimental local propriety. Let Netta be cured, and recover, and he did not care if they placed her in a cellar or attic. He looked to the desired end, disregarding means and methods.

As soon as her bearers had placed wounded Netta Vane on the comfortable broad sofa in the little room, Dr. Snow began

to give his orders. Two female servants had followed the mournful procession.

"Now, Jane, Mary, whatever your names are, light a fire—quick! We must not," he said, turning to Dr. Maturin, "allow the body to cool."

Dr. Maturin made no reply; he was kneeling at the side of the sofa, gently rubbing the hands, which were not now so cold as before. He noticed that the breathing was regular. He knew that was a good sign. Dr. Snow regarded him rather curiously. It was not his province to ask who this pretty young lady might be, but certainly the philanthropic doctor seemed very fond of her.

"Now, Dr. Maturin," he said cheerfully, "allow me!"

And Dr. Snow began his examination, having first removed from the face and head all traces of the blood-stains which had disfigured it.

"The pulse is strong, and respiration good," he pronounced. "Come, come! it is not a bad case of concussion, at any rate."

Dr. Maturin had thought the same. But this outside opinion comforted him greatly.

Dr. Snow's next remark, however, was not encouraging. "There may be injury to the spine, of course. There seem to be no bad lesions. Or partial motor paralysis may declare itself by-and-by."

"You don't *think* so, do you?" Dr. Maturin asked, with anxiety.

"At present it is hard to decide definitely," Dr. Snow answered provokingly. "I confess I don't think it is a bad case. But we must leave it to time. Now, of course, Dr. Maturin, she must not be moved; on no account is she to be moved. And no stimulant to be given. A little arrowroot, or beef-tea. I expect her to become conscious before long. You know the next stage, if it's concussion simply—drowsiness, intense drowsiness, accompanied by sickness; after that, bad headache. But I needn't lecture you on medical science. Who will sit by her? She ought to have a nurse."

"I must send for her mother," Dr. Maturin said, with a heavy sigh. He foresaw the nuisance of having Mrs. Vane in the house, and the difficulty of explaining everything satisfactorily to a woman silly enough to distrust him.

"Does she live far away?" Dr. Snow's question was not devoid of an element of innocent curiosity.

"Bayswater."

"I'm going into the High Street now. I'll take a telegram, if you like."

"Thanks. There's no need to trouble you. I can send a servant."

"Very well. I will look in again in a couple of hours. By-the-by, I forgot to ask. What is the name of—ahem!—my lady patient?"

"Miss Vane," Dr. Maturin replied, almost fiercely.

"A relative, I suppose," Dr. Snow remarked inquiringly.

"None whatever." Dr. Maturin's tone was defiant.

"Well, well, soon to be one, perhaps. You've a large house, Maturin, here—you owe it to society to marry again. Such a long time since the last sad event, you know—not the marriage, I mean, but the decease."

Dr. Snow brushed his hat the wrong way, awkwardly, and went out, receiving no answer from Dr. Maturin, who had simply turned his back, and was bending anxiously over the sofa.

"Inquisitive, canting old fool!" Dr. Maturin hissed out after him as the door shut.

Dr. Snow was hoping, as he walked homeward, that he had not offended by his harmless remarks. Maturin, he thought, seemed to be a good judge of looks in woman. Why, his first wife was a beauty. And now there was another decidedly handsome girl apparently driving about London with him. Probably they were engaged. He would find out more when the mother arrived.

Two hours later, punctual to his promise, he did call again, and he did find Mrs. Vane there. She had arrived half an hour before. She had come alone, Mildred being out with the colonel; and of course she was terribly shocked to see her loved daughter lying on the sofa, battered and unconscious. That she should have come to misfortune in Dr. Maturin's company seemed natural. But just now the mother had no time to consider the circumstances leading to the accident; she was burning to know from an independent doctor what he thought of the chances of recovery. Dr. Snow made another examination, and his report was decidedly favorable.

"Depend upon it, she will wake soon, and be very drowsy, or else headachy—I don't know which. It depends on the extent of the lesion. There are symptoms that the collapse stage will terminate ere long."

"Oh, I am so thankful! Then, you don't consider it very, very serious?" Mrs. Vane asked.

"Well, no, but I can't promise decidedly just yet. You may make your mind easy, my dear madam. All you must do is to keep her quiet, and after that——"

"May she be moved from *this* house soon?"

Mrs. Vane's question was impetuous, and Dr. Snow was rather surprised. Why did she dislike the house, if her daughter and Dr. Maturin were engaged? But he answered emphatically—

"By no means. Don't think of such a thing yet. I shall be able to judge better of that to-morrow."

After giving ample instructions as to how the patient was to be treated in case she awoke, and finding that Mrs. Vane preferred watching by the sofa-side herself rather than have a professional nurse, Dr. Snow left, promising to come in once again before midnight. He had to give a report to Dr. Maturin when he left the room. Dr. Maturin had settled on his line of conduct when Mrs. Vane arrived. He would not cease his active solicitude for Netta. But he would not invite Mrs. Vane's hostility by thrusting himself into the room too often. He would show Netta how he loved her when she became conscious. He believed that she would wake soon; and his belief was very soon justified.

It was not a gradual awakening. She suddenly became fully conscious, more alive to everything that was passing round her than she had ever been before. There was no dim interval in which memory had painfully to hunt along the half-obliterated trail of the events which had preceded the accident. Every incident of that day stood out clearly in her mind, up to the moment when she felt the shock to the carriage at the foot of the Manor Hill, and herself being lifted up as if by some superhuman force, together with the frail framework in which she sat. As she turned on her side to see where she was, a form bent over her. Yes, that was her mother. She smiled, and tried to speak, but was astonished to find how weak her voice was. As for poor Mrs. Vane, she was so overjoyed to see the return of consciousness in her loved child, that she could not help clasping her hands together and thanking Heaven for its mercy amid her fast-falling tears. In a moment, however, she remembered the medical injunctions to keep the patient quiet. Hastily she *dried her tears*, and as Netta endeavored to ask exactly what

had happened, and where she was, her mother placed her finger on her lips, and said in the softest whisper—

“Not now, my darling. You must go to sleep. I will watch over you.

But there was one question which came to the patient’s lips, and which she could not suppress.

“Mother, tell me,” she said, “is *he* hurt—Hartas ?”

“Not at all. He is quite well.”

She sank back on the sofa with eyes closed, and a feeling of great thankfulness at her heart. She was conscious that her body was bruised all over. Each movement of the limbs meant pain. But what the doctor had prophesied did not prove correct. There was no drowsiness, no headache afterwards. Netta wondered in her own mind, why she was lying there, whether any limbs were broken. She had no difficulty at in concluding that the shock, which was the last thing she could remember, must have been an accident to the carriage in which she and Hartas were driving. She had not much inclination to talk, but her mind, she knew, was active—almost preternaturally active. It glanced with an eagle’s swiftness of flight over the interview with Bastian, as well as what had preceded and followed it. Then bit by bit she began to recall just what he had said, what Hartas had said, until the whole conversation was as plain before her as if it had been written on the wall of the room in which she was lying.

It was not a large room. She was first struck with the sombre coloring of the walls. Then she noticed that they were stained in some deep tint of olive green. There was a fireplace close to the head of her sofa : by moving a little she could see the flames flickering. Opposite her was a great bookshelf, filled with rather mouldy looking volumes of medical lore, protected by a glass front. In one corner was a large chest or stand of some kind, rising half-way to the ceiling, and covered over with a huge sheet. The armchair in which her mother sat was curiously carved ; so, she noticed, was all the furniture, and it all looked heavy sombre, and black. The whole room struck her as cheerless, except the fireplace, which had a small pier-glass over it, and one or two pictures in frames arranged upon the mantle.

Presently what she had been waiting and hoping for happened. The door opened gently. Dr. Maturin himself entered. It was evident that he had not seen Mrs. Vane before,

for he advanced quickly towards her, took her hand in both of his, and said—

"I am so glad you have come. Poor little Netta! Dr. Snow has told you how it all happened. Rather a bad accident; but he is confident she is not seriously hurt, and will become conscious before long."

"She has become conscious already, I am thankful to say," Mrs. Vane replied.

Dr. Maturin gave one glance to the sofa, and, noticing that Netta's eyes were wide open, was quickly on his knees at her side.

"My darling! How you have frightened us all! And will you forgive me for taking you in that carriage? Stop! No words! Let me feel your pulse. That's right. You must keep perfectly quiet. You will soon be yourself again, thank Heaven! Your mother is here. Shall I watch by your side till you fall asleep?"

The pressure of the hand showed that this was what she *did* desire. A little nourishment was given her, then the firelight was kept off her face with a screen, and with her mother at the foot of the sofa, and her lover at her side, she thought—thought—thought for a whole hour. Her eyes were closed and Dr. Maturin supposed she had fallen asleep, for after sitting patiently for the hour's space he rose and, walking on tiptoe, opened the door and went out. Half an hour later Dr. Snow looked in again. He examined the patient's face carefully, and held a whispered colloquy with Mrs. Vane. Something induced Netta not to open her eyes; she felt tired, and guessed this must be a strange doctor. Instinct told her she would recover, without any doctor's help, if she remained at rest. Lying thus, perfectly still, in the dimly lit room, she heard her mother say—

"Why was she brought in here, Dr. Snow?"

"The servants brought her here. I thought it would be better than one of the ordinary living-rooms of the house."

"Could not a bedroom have been got ready?"

"They are all upstairs. You see, I did not know how serious the case might be. These brain injuries are not to be trifled with. The less moving she had the better; so I had her brought into this room, as the servants told me there was a sofa in it."

"It is Dr. Maturin's surgery, is it not?"

"His professional room, I think; yes."

Mrs. Vane lowered her voice still more.

"But this is the room where—where that dreadful event happened—years ago?"

Dr. Snow believed Netta to be fast asleep, and answered rather louder, as if the best way to banish any foolish womanly and superstitious terrors was to be blunt and practical.

"The accidental death of Mrs. Maturin, you mean. Yes, it was here that the occurrence happened, I believe."

Mrs. Vane shuddered. Then she stepped anxiously to her daughter's couch. No, there was no sign that she had heard; she was breathing quietly, as if asleep.

"How long do you think she will have to stay in this horrible room, then?" Mrs. Vane asked anxiously. "Cannot she be moved home at once? Our house, you know, is at Bayswater."

"Out of the question," Dr. Snow said decidedly. "I thought, when I first saw her, it would be an affair of weeks. But now, as you say she has been conscious, and showed none of the ordinary symptoms of concussion or paralysis, I think she will mend rapidly. I can't say for certain, but I should think the head was contused, but that the body felt the worst of the shock. If so, recovery will be rapid, as from an ordinary bruise to the bones and skin—though, of course, much worse in this case. The brain cannot be seriously hurt, and that is the great thing."

"To-morrow," Mrs. Vane insisted; "surely we can move her to-morrow?"

"Possibly to-morrow," Dr. Snow rejoined, as if this was a matter which he did not consider of such importance as his questioner. "At this state nothing can be said definitely, and we must be careful not to delay recovery by precipitate action of any kind. Your daughter, I am sure, will receive every attention under Dr. Maturin's roof."

Netta herself, in her battered condition, was grateful to the stranger for saying this. A little later she heard the door open and close gently, and she was sure he had gone out. Her mother took her seat again with a sigh.

It was now twelve. Had Netta known how late it was, she would have roused herself to tell her mother to go to bed, or to have a bed made up in a room near her. But she did not know how many hours she had been unconscious, and it still seemed to her as if it were late afternoon.

The brain, in its excited, stimulated condition, wanted

fresh food for thought ; and Dr. Snow's words had supplied it in abundance. So this—this very room had been the scene of an awful tragedy many years before—a tragedy intimately concerning the man with whom her own love and fate were now securely intertwined. If her mother had not been close at hand, such a dismal association might have frightened her. But as it was, she simply pondered and pondered, without fear, on the fact that here, in this room, the woman whom Hartas had once worshipped, to whom he had given the priceless blessing of his affection, had breathed her last.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN THE CHAMBER OF DEATH.

THE fire went flickering on, and very soon Mrs. Vane stepped softly to the recess in the wall where the candle stood and blew it out ; but not before Netta had noticed that the mantelpiece over the hearth was of marble, and that on this mantelpiece there was something of great interest to herself. It was not the old and dusty timepiece which stood in the centre, but which had long since given up the unprofitable occupation of ticking to empty chairs. There was a common frame for holding a cabinet-sized photograph on the left of the clock, and in this frame there was the face of a young woman, which, while the candle was alight, could be seen clearly enough to distinguish features and to obtain a very distinct impression of the character of the whole.

It was a laughing face, trying to look grave for once. There was in the eyes a liquid sparkle, capitally reproduced by the photographer's art. The eyes looked out from under a rather high forehead, surmounted by wavy hair ; and there was a delicate little chin, and half-parted lips, and—yes, Netta admitted to herself, the face was really very girlish and pretty. Her position prevented her from doing more than glancing at the photograph sideways every now and then ; it fatigued her to look long and to turn her head to the angle necessary for a view. When she first saw this picture, curiosity took possession of her mind ; then a spasm of jealousy—never felt before—darted across her brain, and

made her momentarily miserable. But at the very next look jealousy was suddenly changed into surprised pleasure, and a blush rose to her cheek, ill as she felt herself to be. For this second look of the mysterious picture made her feel almost positive that it was a likeness of herself. How stupid of her not to recognize it! But then, how had Hartas got possession of it? She had given him a picture of herself, but it was a full-length portrait. Still, it was a delicious feeling to know that he cared about her so much that he surreptitiously obtained likenesses of her and dotted them about his house, even in out-of-the-way rooms like this one in which she was lying.

It was astonishing to herself how clear her mind was, after such an accident as she knew must have befallen her. Her brain seemed to beat with an intenser life than it had ever known before, in proportion as her bodily faculties were numbed and paralyzed. She only desired to lie still, to do nothing, as far as her body was concerned, for she felt unaccountably weary and averse from movement; but her mind roved with abnormal speed amid all the scenes of her past history, until it finally fixed on Bastian's little chamber in the East End, and insisted for the second time on minutely rehearsing all that had been done and said there. She could still recall every word, every gesture.

Two opposing currents were striving to master and carry her off captive. She was still powerfully under the influence of the mystic's extraordinary character and unselfish life. In spite of all that he had said to offend her and to slander Hartas, she recognized his singleness of purpose, and she could no more throw off the dominating influence of his spirit than she could forget the words he had uttered to her lover. Her lover, too, was a strong force—she thought far the stronger; it was with him she sympathized, his side she took, passionately and unhesitatingly, in the dispute with Bastian. Yet she was conscious that it was a wrench to give up the latter as her guide and philosophic friend. He spoke noble words, she knew. He did splendid deeds. But he had vilified Hartas. There was one sentence rising out of the sea of words which she looked back on, and showing distinct and clear-cut along the avenues of memory—it was addressed by him to Hartas. "Think! is there no soul passed out of life belonging to one who had cause to feel fear of you, of one *whom you have wronged*?" What right had he to sup-

pose that Hartas ever had wronged or ever would wrong any human being? It was a burning shame to imagine such things; to——

But just then it was that Mrs. Vane stirred in her chair, preparatory to rising slowly and quietly to slip into the corner and extinguish the glare of the solitary candle. Netta had no notion how late it might be; but she felt that she might not be able to take another look at the face on the mantelpiece if she did not do so now. And with the gratifying feeling at her soul that her lover had put it there, to worship herself through her paper image, she again turned her head, and riveted her gaze on that pallid, laughing face.

This time the result was disappointing, and harmonized well with the sudden gloom which fell on the room from the extinction of the light. For that last look had broken the charm and dispelled the pleasant illusion, and Netta was now certain that, whomever that portrait was meant to represent, it was not herself. Yet it was wonderfully like her. Only one or two slight points about it convinced her that some other woman had been the original. The high lace collar was such as she herself never wore. There was the glint of an earring visible, and Netta had never indulged in earrings. Then the mouth was not exactly like her own; it was more slight, more open, weaker in expression. The puzzle was to know who the pretty lady—she now felt less hesitation in acknowledging that she *was* very pretty—might be whom Hartas delighted to honor with a frame and a place on his mantelpiece.

Ah! how simple the solution! And how slow she had been in seeing it! As she suddenly once again remembered Dr. Snow's dreadful words as to the very room where she lay having been the place where the former Mrs. Maturin had breathed her last, it flashed upon her that that portrait was the picture of the woman whom Hartas had once loved. Had he not said once how she reminded him of his first wife? No wonder she now thought. A wave of loving sympathy for that poor, sweet-faced, dead woman who had loved Hartas once as she did now swept across her, and she longed for light to gaze once more on her portrait, now buried with the rest of the room in a gloom not relieved, but rather increased, by the fitful spurts of flame from the fireplace.

She turned her head in the direction of the mantelpiece. *Was it a fancy, or could the eyes of the picture pierce the*

darkness and shine on her? She seemed to see those eyes, and she seemed to be losing sense of her own more fortunate lot in the mental contemplation of that old tragedy, and in pity for the victim of such an untimely death. It was in this room that she had perished. Suddenly Netta felt a horror of the room, and would have wished to fly from it; but she could not cry out, nor hardly move. Her mother, she knew, was still in that armchair, for she saw her form, and the hand grasping the old woodwork. Perhaps that was just how the first Janet had sat, and breathed the fatal poison of the atmosphere, and died. Horrible! Did everybody die who lay or slept or sat in that room? Was it a death-chamber indeed? She felt a sense of suffocation, and raised her head slightly, while the ill-omened words rang strangely in her ears, "Think! is there any soul of one whom in the past you have wronged?" But her strength was not equal to the effort, and she fell back on her pillow.

What a delightful change! Surely some transformation scene had happened! Why, all was brilliant light, and there was the sound of a piano playing; and, as she looked down, Netta saw to her amazement that she was playing it herself, and singing, too, to her own accompaniment, but it was a song that she had never sung before. And the room was quite different—why, it looked exactly like the drawing-room of Freemantle House; and there was somebody bending lovingly over her, turning over the pages of her song. It was Hartas, only looking younger—yes, much younger. And as she gazed at him, he walked to the door with light and springy step, and went out, blowing her a kiss with his hand.

Then she began to think that this Hartas was not precisely the same as she knew. What was the difference? He was out of the room, and she had plenty of time for thought about him. It was theatrical, the way in which he blew that kiss. He did not appear actually to mean the love it represented. His eyes had not seemed really full of kindness, as she knew them. It seemed as if he were acting a part, and she shivered as she felt herself asking, "Does he really love me?" Such a thought had never come to her before; she had been quite certain Hartas not only loved, but adored her. And now he seemed changed. There was something, forced and formal about his love; it was the stage love of a perfect actor, not of a man. How long she went on thinking, thinking, and *trying to discover* where the difference lay between her own

ideal Hartas and the one who, looking twenty years younger, had gone out from her presence, she did not know. Time seemed to have no business in the place where she now was. There was no need for hurry, it appeared; the peculiarity of that brilliantly illuminated room seemed to be that it would never change; that it was the whole world to her; that no duties waited for her outside; and that as long as she liked to stay there it would remain light, warm, and luxuriously comfortable. She did not think of her mother. She thought of nobody but Hartas and herself; and somehow there gradually forced itself on her mind the strong unreasoned conviction that she was married to Hartas Maturin; that she had lived in that house for a long time already, as its mistress and his wife.

It was a strange, almost a monstrous, fancy; but then, everything in this vision of the night was strange. With a gathering sense of fear, she began to realize two hideous facts: the one that he had ceased to love her; the other that, in spite of this, she was bound to him by the marriage tie. And amid this fear she was conscious at the same time, through all the developing scenes of the dream, of a remarkable curiosity to know what would come next. She was able to contemplate her own fate as if she were an unconcerned spectator; to forget that her own happiness depended on whether or no that view of her husband not loving her was correct. But then there came a reaction, and a sense of personal misery suffused her brain; for in the dream she still loved him fervently, and her heart bled to see that the love was not returned.

* * * * *

It was now one o'clock in the morning. The little spurts of flame which had enlivened the hearth were no longer visible; the fire had burned itself into a red glow, its coals caked into a mass; no sound but the ticking of a small carriage clock—brought from his own library by the amorous doctor—and the sleeper's quick breathing could be heard. The watcher herself in that bed-like armchair was asleep, dozing after the excitement and anxiety of the day, but ready to wake at a moment's notice if her daughter needed anything.

She was woke by a startling incident enough. A shrill cry, once, twice renewed, echoed through the room, inarticulate, almost like that of an animal in mortal pain.

"What is it? Oh, what is it?" she exclaimed, instantly wide awake in breathless horror. In a moment she had sprung to the bed where her daughter lay, fearing, yet not knowing what it was she feared to see.

There lay the patient. She was panting violently, but had not screamed again. Even now her hands clasped the bed-clothes mechanically with a rigid grasp. Her forehead was beaded with drops of perspiration. Her eyes were wide open, and stared at the light as it was brought near her with fixed, unfaltering gaze. The brain still seemed busy with something that had appalled it in sleep; some dread phantom of the darkness from which she was but just slowly recovering.

She was now quite awake, perfectly conscious. Yet her mind was no longer clear. She moved uneasily, and the first thing she felt distinctly, beyond relief to have escaped terrible nightmare, was a tremendous weariness of the brain. The fatigue and bruised feeling seemed to have abandoned her limbs, and concentrated itself in her head. Her forehead seemed made of lead. She pressed her hand to it; how hot it was, and moist with perspiration drops! There was her dear protecting mother at her side, and she smiled languidly on her.

"How are you now, darling?" Mrs. Vane was inexpressibly glad to see this sign of returning sanity.

"My head throbs so. I have seen—I have dreamed—oh, so much!"

"You don't know how you startled me! You cried out in your sleep. Do you think you could take a little tea, dear?" she ended practically.

To Mrs. Vane's great joy, Netta raised herself slowly on one arm and came into a half-sitting posture. It showed that the fear of injury to the spine might be abandoned, she thought. But there was the brain—that might have suffered hurt. And the next words uttered almost made her mother fear that the brain *was* disordered.

"Shall I ever remember it all?" Netta said, in almost despairing tones, to herself.

"What—remember what, darling?"

"Oh, all that has happened, just now."

"About the accident? You must not trouble about that yet. You shall hear everything when you are quite strong again."

"Oh no! it is since the accident. Just now; it must have been just now. Oh, if my head did not throb so, then I could think!" and she pressed both hands to her forehead.

Mrs. Vane was alarmed, and thought it prudent not to inquire further. She sat by the sofa-side, holding her daughter's hand, till the latter fell into a dreamless sleep, which lasted till the summer sun was in the sky.

Poor Mrs. Vane had ample time to ponder over the incident of the dream. She did not wonder much that her daughter's sleep should be disturbed. But she longed for the doctor to come, to pronounce on the condition of her dear patient. She knew that Dr. Maturin would want to know the latest news, and it was sent early to him; but Dr. Snow had mentioned that perhaps Dr. Maturin had better not go into the room in the morning, until the patient's state was ascertained. She might wake in a brain-condition for which all excitement of any kind would be very injurious.

Her second sleep of that night was heavy and dreamless; when she awoke, she remained lying quietly where she was. Across her pain-racked forehead there shot every now and then a desire to wrestle with the problem which seemed to be clogging her brain. Something, she felt, of infinite importance to herself had occurred. The tenor of her life would be changed, she knew, when she could recollect what it was. But it was bewildering to find that beyond this dull sense of a momentous crisis in her existence having come and gone, and a wild wish now and then to rise up and grapple with thought, and try to bring back recollection of the last few hours, no definite memory of her dream remained. She did not think of it as a dream. To her it was an intense reality, only its outlines had faded away. In the weltering surge of brain-weakness, and of brain-images that came into view only to disappear, there seemed no foothold for memory to stand firm and erect upon; the structures that Netta painfully tried to build up out of the material floating in her mind sank down again after a moment's labor, as though founded on sand. This was disturbing and rather horrifying. It was not less disturbing to her usually cheerful and gay disposition to feel a conviction that what had happened, whatever it was, had sown in her mind distrust of her lover; that Dr. Maturin had been seriously lowered and *cheapened*, apparently for no reason whatever of any tangible description.

When Dr. Snow called, his professional instincts were somewhat outraged by the fact that Miss Vane's illness was not taking precisely the course which he had prescribed for it. Poor Mrs. Vane thought that the frown on his forehead denoted that something had gone wrong with his patient, and anxiously inquired if she were not so well.

"Yes, yes, my dear madam," Dr. Snow at once assured her, "better, much better than I expected; better then she has any right to be."

Netta smiled, and asked languidly if she should be able to get up soon. She felt a great desire to leave the room where she was—to leave Freemantle House, and to be nursed at home, if nursing were necessary.

But Dr. Snow thought discretion the better part of the pharmacopœia.

"I positively forbid you to get up to-day," he said. "You are going on very well—capitally, and we don't want to do anything to retard convalescence. Stay quite quiet to-day; to-morrow you may very likely sit up in an armchair; then the next day a turn in the garden in a bath-chair, perhaps, would be feasible."

"If I get as far as the garden," the patient said wearily, "I shall go home. I want to go home."

Mrs. Vane was glad to hear such a sentiment from Netta. Was she becoming disgusted with Maturin? Was she angry with him for having allowed the accident to happen? If so she felt the indignation was rather illogical and ignoble, but she did not despise even ignoble feelings if they helped in the truly noble object of rescuing the girl from her would-be husband.

In this way it came about that Miss Netta remained one day and one night longer at Dr. Maturin's house, still watched over by her mother, and partly also by Mildred, who insisted on sharing the task, and whose presence seemed to give the patient real pleasure; still occasionally visited by Dr. Snow; still seeing Dr. Maturin himself come in and out quietly, softly, chat a few minutes, bring delicacies to tempt her appetite, take her hand in his, tell her to "try and sleep," and then flit out again, in accordance with his predetermined policy of not boring his future mother-in-law. And Mrs. Vane could not but acknowledge that he behaved with perfect propriety and with great consideration for her feelings. He *did not*, just because her daughter happened to be ill in his

house, obtrude himself as the master of the house; he allowed Mrs. Vane and Mildred to feel that they enjoyed almost as much privacy as if they had been in their home at Bayswater.

Dr. Maturin, however, was a little disturbed and perplexed by finding that Netta herself received his morning visit with an apathetic listlessness not usual with her. Dr. Snow had told him she was ever so much better. He had expected to find himself welcomed with one of her bright smiles, and possibly with one of those merry little laughs he had learned to love. He came in laden with flowers from the conservatory; yet his betrothed just turned her head in his direction, seemed to regard him fixedly for a few moments, and then sighed deeply. Tears even, he noticed, came into her eyes as he knelt by the bed and kissed her hand. Was that Dr. Snow making a mistake, he wondered, over the case? Was she worse than he thought?

In the afternoon he sat with her for a couple of hours. Very few words passed between them. His darling seemed drowsy. The doctor had been attempting to talk lightly and cheerfully about various social topics, when he was surprised by seeing her press her hand to her forehead suddenly, and say exultingly—

“Ah! now—now—a little; I remember a little.”

“Dearest!” the doctor exclaimed, “what is it?”

Whatever it was, his voice seemed to break the spell. She burst into a little wailing cry.

“No, it is gone; it is gone.” Then the tears began to flow silently.

The doctor felt uneasy. *What* was it she was trying to remember? He did not think this seemed like disease; it seemed more as if Netta were really puzzling, in her weak state of brain, over some forgotten occurrence. Dr. Maturin still remembered that East End charlatan and his croaking prophecies; just the sort of things to turn a girl’s head. They had even had some effect on his own. He felt a little alarmed at the supposition that Netta was now recalling what the man had said. He wished all that forgotten; he had hoped the shock of the accident would obliterate it.

He sat on by her side, and there was no recurrence of the tears or exclamation. When he pressed her hand, she returned the pressure, but very slightly. He longed for the *time of her recovery*, when she would be her own happy, lovely, trusting self again; his passionate love for her would

have broken out in words now had her mother not been present. For that day and part of the day after he had to content himself with the thought that Janet Vane's apathy and listlessness in his presence—he would not call it coldness—resulted from the shock she had received; and the next afternoon Dr. Snow, although reluctantly, gave permission for the move to Bayswater. For Netta was able to walk slowly. Her spine was evidently unaffected; and that curious, dreamy disregard of her surroundings, and preoccupation with puzzling thoughts, seemed to be an effect on the brain which would soon wear off.

Others, at a distance, were thinking of her as she lay at Dr. Maturin's house, unable to be moved. For instance, Mr. Bob Betteridge. Directly the news of the accident which had befallen Miss Janet Vane reached the Betteridges' mansion at Reigate, Bob started off in great consternation to make all possible inquiries. He arrived as early as ten o'clock in the morning at the Bayswater house, laden with hothouse grapes for the patient. Disappointment awaited him, as she, of course, was not there. Bob was ushered into the dining-room, where the colonel was breakfasting in solitary splendor, for Mildred had already gone off to join her mother at the bedside of her sister. He could hardly believe the colonel when the latter informed him that his daughter was being treated "at Dr. Maturin's house at Manor End, you know."

"Why is she there?" Bob asked abruptly.

"Well," Colonel Vane replied, not knowing quite how much Bob did or did not know on the subject of Netta's engagement, "it happened to be the nearest house to the place where the accident occurred, so they took her in there, you see. Her mother's with her, of course."

Bob was inwardly fuming with suppressed curiosity and general disapproval of this conjunction of his idol with Maturin.

"It's odd," he said. "Why did they take her in there, of all places? I mean, what made her go driving about in such an out-of-the-way part by herself?"

"She wasn't by herself," the colonel exclaimed. "Take some breakfast, Bob. I'll ring for some more toast to be made."

"Thanks; I've had mine an hour or two ago. Then, was *Mrs. Vane* pitched out of the carriage at the same time?"

"Mrs. Vane? Oh dear, no! She wasn't there. Maturin was the only other person in the carriage. *He* came in for a share of the tumble, but doesn't seem to have been hurt."

Bob stared. He could only think of one question to ask, and he asked it.

"Is Dr. Maturin engaged to your youngest daughter?"

"Yes, he is. That is to say, they both wish it, but Mrs. Vane does not much approve. But it's a secret, Bob, at present."

Bob had gone to the window, and was looking out. He did not say anything. He saw the distant trees of the park over some low housetops; they were tossing gayly in a wind. The liveliness of the branches disgusted him. Why should there be life and movement everywhere that morning, when he himself was experiencing the first great shock he had ever known? Up to that moment he certainly had not realized how much he had been in love with Janet Vane.

"I see Mowbray's first favorite for the Leger, Bob," the colonel broke in on his thoughts by saying.

"I don't care; I've given up the turf. Not that I mayn't take to it again; I think I shall."

"You seem out of sorts."

"Here," said Bob, turning round abruptly, and pushing the grape-basket towards the colonel, "I brought these for Miss Netta Vane. You can send 'em her; but it's hardly worth while. Maturin will give her all sorts of delicacies, no doubt."

"Thanks. Very kind of you," said the colonel, rising. "You won't mind my running away now, will you? The fact is, I've an engagement in the City—rather important—at eleven o'clock. Must start at once."

"I'll come with you," said Bob, desperately. "I've nothing to do. Scotland Yard may fish for me."

This was hardly what Colonel Vane wanted. He was going to pay a call, deferred for some days, at the address of the obliging gentleman whom Dr. Maturin had spoken of as probably willing to accommodate the colonel with either five hundred or five forty, as the case might be. If Bob came with him, he could hardly conceal his errand from him.

"No, you must not dream of putting yourself out like *that*," he said hastily. "I'm going right down into the *wilds* of the City—Threadneedle Street, or close by. It

would be taking you from your work, eh? And—and I think you had better *not* come, Bob—I do indeed.”

“Thanks; I’ve no work to-day. Anything for a change.” Bob put on his hat with savage firmness. Then he took Colonel Vane’s arm suddenly, and half pulled the colonel out of the room. “No time to lose, Vane; half-past ten now. We’ll jump into a cab, and rattle down.”

Colonel Vane inwardly cursed the leech-like adhesiveness of his companion. But he could not dismiss him without rudeness. And Bob seemed to be determined to come. Indeed, his manner was altogether peculiar to-day. The colonel did not relish upsetting him; so the end of it was that the pair were soon bowling along Oxford Street, the colonel leaning back and grumbling at the fatuity of the Ministry in not giving him a diplomatic post; Bob, with his arms on the front of the cab, looking in a vacant way at the passing passengers, pretending to listen to the colonel, but really immersed in black and gloomy cogitations over the utter worthlessness of life, and the stupidity of adorable Netta Vane in getting engaged to Maturin.

They stopped, after a time, at a house in a little by-street off Threadneedle Street. The name on the door was Mr. Raphael.

“Why,” exclaimed Bob, “I know this man! He’s a money-lender. I say, Vane, what the deuce are you up to?”

The colonel looked rather blue at the unnatural sagacity displayed by Bob.

“How can you tell it’s a money-lender? I don’t know anything about the man.”

“Oh no!” said Bob, sarcastically. “Well, you’ll know more about him presently; fifty per cent. more, no doubt. Go in and be fleeced. I’ll wait for you here;” and he folded his arms and settled himself down in a corner of the cab.

Colonel Vane’s business, whatever it was, only took ten minutes. He returned in that time, looking jubilant.

“Where are you going to now, Bob? I don’t want the cab; do you? Let’s walk about a bit.”

The cab was dismissed. Bob took the colonel’s arm, and began a little practical advice. He thought the colonel, who was sharp enough before he left England, had been turned into rather a greenhorn by his Greek exile.

“These money-lenders are infernal scoundrels,” he began. “What on earth do you want money for, Vane?”

The colonel, who had a check for five forty in his pocket, payable to bearer, was in far too good spirits to be very reticent.

"Look here, Bob," he said, "you're making a great mistake, if you think I'm being swindled. I know my way about too well. I'll tell you something, if"—then followed the colonel's usual formula—"you'll swear to keep it to yourself."

"Certainly," said Bob.

"Then, I was fool enough," and the colonel gave a brief account of the little financial escapade in which he had been engaged, of the debt of five hundred pounds, ending up with, "But Maturin's helped me out of the hole."

"Has he? How?" said Bob, in real surprise.

"Well, he told me about Raphael; and he's lent me the money at only five per cent, because he knows Maturin." The colonel paused. He wondered if Bob would consider *this* helping a man out of a hole.

"Very kind," said Bob, dryly. "It strikes me Maturin is rich enough to have lent you the money himself, at nothing at all per cent."

The colonel stopped, and whispered impressively into Bob's ear, "He's really done as much as that. More too. He's a trump."

"Why, *you* are borrowing, aren't you, not Maturin?"

"Yes, but," the colonel added, in a burst of confidence, "Maturin has promised to repay the loan when"—proudly—"he becomes my son-in-law. What do you think of *that*?" and he gave a knowing wink, and slapped Bob heartily on the back.

"Think!" said Bob, coloring crimson. "I think Maturin's a plotting, sneaking cur. He's bribed you to let your daughter marry him. And I'll take good care I let him know what I think of him for it!" Bob exclaimed, in a tempest of wrath.

"I'll thank you not to use such language about *me*," said the colonel, angrily. "Bribed!" This was the exact expression that the colonel's own conscience had used to himself several times. Bob's words came as a disagreeable echo. "And, remember! you've promised not to say a word about it. You know you did!" Colonel Vane began to be really alarmed at what Maturin would say or do if he found that Bob had been told the strict financial secret.

"Yes," said Bob, gloomily, "I did. I don't deny it. You've

got me there. But don't expect *me* to speak to Maturin again. If I do, it's sure to come out, what I think about him. And you'll be a confounded old fool, Vane, if you let your daughter marry a calculating fellow like that!"

So saying, Bob hailed a passing hansom, said, "Whitehall," and disappeared from Colonel Vane's view, who was left to reflect that perhaps in the incidents of that morning he had not displayed all the diplomatic ability which he undoubtedly possessed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BOB IS GENEROUS.

IN spite of this quarrel, and general hopelessness, our moth still fluttered round the flame. The next time that Mr. Robert Betteridge called at the Bayswater lodgings, he found that Netta Vane had already come back. It was in the afternoon that he paid his visit, and he was surprised to hear that the members of the family who were at home were "Mrs. Vane and Miss Netta."

"Is Miss Netta Vane much better, then?" he asked at once.

"Oh yes, sir; almost herself again."

He was conducted upstairs into the drawing-room, and there another little surprise awaited him. Netta was the only occupant of the room. She rose from a deep armchair to receive him, but he could not see that she had had a book or piece of needlework in her hands; apparently she had been sitting in the chair thinking.

A slight blush rose to her cheeks as she shook hands and answered Bob's inquiries as to her condition of health after the accident. She listened quietly while he expressed his condolence, his anxiety, and the anxiety of his family, to know how she was going on. She assured him that she would soon be quite well, the doctor said. No, not Dr. Maturin (with another blush). A suburban doctor, Dr. Snow, had attended her while she was lying ill there; and now her mother had called in an eminent West End medical man. Mr. Betteridge would excuse her mother not being there just *then*? The fact was, she had gone to lie down. She had

been sitting up and getting very little rest since the accident happened, and now she was feeling the effects. But the servant would call her, if Mr. Betteridge desired.

"Oh no! I don't want to see her at all," Bob assured Netta, quite frankly. "I mean," he added, with an infectious smile, of course, I should like to see her if she were here; but I would not disturb her for anything. Your company is quite enough for me, Miss Vane. But how—how seedy you are looking!" Just at that moment Netta turned her head slightly away, as if interested in observing the houses on the opposite side of the road, and Bob could distinctly trace the tokens of tears on her cheeks. Forgetting decorum and everything else in the painful interest of this discovery, he exclaimed, "You are unhappy about something! Tell me what it is. Can't I do anything to help you? I would do anything; I would give worlds to help you, if I could!"

There was no mistaking the genuineness of Bob's offer; his words and tone were so kind that Netta's eyes at once became wet again in an unaccountable and provoking manner. She felt angry with herself for lowering her dignity in this way.

"I am only weak after my illness," she said, and tried to smile. "The doctor says I must go away for a change soon."

"Of course, you feel pulled down. It must have been rather a bad upset." When he entered the room, Bob had intended to avoid the smallest allusion to Maturin. But the subject seemed to fascinate him against his will. He had already mentioned the detested name once. Now he added, "Was the doctor hurt too?" He half hoped that her engagement to his clever brother-in-law might have something to do with her tears.

It seemed that a curious change passed over the pale face before she answered. It was as if she had made an effort to master some tormenting puzzle, and had failed.

"Yes, he was hurt; very little." Netta uttered the words with a sad tone in her voice. It did not seem sorrow for the doctor's injuries. But nobody could have mistaken her for a very happy woman at that moment, especially as at the end she gave a deep sigh.

It was a dangerous sigh to Bob's impressionable nature. *He felt dreadfully inclined to throw himself on the carpet, and kiss the hand that was resting listlessly on the edge*

of the armchair. He restrained himself from any physical manifestation of his feelings. But he could not resist saying—

"I'm so sorry to see you looking so sad. I'm sure something is troubling you. I've no right to inquire, of course, but is it—is it anything to do with Colonel Vane's money matters, his debt—" He stopped abruptly, and added, "Is that what's worrying you?"

In reply, she looked up with a startled glance. How could Bob know anything about that transaction? She was really astonished at his knowing. The flush that mounted to her cheeks Bob took for a confession. He at once rose from his seat, and said kindly—

"It's a shame of me to bother you just now. I see you're not well enough to talk; but you'll soon be better. You want cheerful society—balls, concerts, that sort of thing, I think. At least, you will in a day or two, when you're a little stronger. Should I find the colonel at home, do you think?"

"He was in the study a little while ago. But don't go."

"Oh, yes," said Bob, controlling himself and smiling cheerfully. "I assure you it's best for you not to be bothered just yet. That's my prescription, Miss Vane. And read some good racy novels. Good-bye."

Netta was sorry he had gone. She felt disturbed at his knowing about the colonel's debt, and would have liked to ask him some questions. Then, he was a cheerful companion, no doubt. She resumed her seat in a state of pitiable and unaccountable depression.

Bob found the colonel at home, and utterly idle. He used less ceremony with him than with his daughter. He certainly was polite enough to knock at the door before entering. But he forgot to shake hands, and, walking quickly up to the table at which Colonel Vane was seated, he said—

"I'll trouble you for that I.O.U., colonel."

"Eh?" exclaimed the colonel, in great amazement.

"That I.O.U.," Bob repeated sternly.

"My dear fellow! glad to see you. What I.O.U. do you mean?" The colonel had almost forgotten that little quarrel.

"Raphael's," was the reply. Bob did not feel in the humor to waste words.

"But, my dear Bob, I've not got it. Raphael's got it."

"What an ass I am!" Bob exclaimed. "Of course he has. What was I thinking of?"

He moved towards the door, when the colonel stopped him by saying, half reproachfully—

"Are you thinking of borrowing yourself, Bob, eh?"

"Not I."

"Well, stop a minute, won't you? D'you want an introduction to Raphael? You don't deserve it; but I'll give you one." The sense of power, of self-importance, was always pleasant to Colonel Vane. He was even proud to be able to introduce anybody to a money-lender!

"No, thanks," said Bob. "Met him before, at a trial."

"Mind you, he'll charge *you* more than five per cent."

"But I tell you I'm not going to borrow from him. On second thoughts, Vane, if you gave me a card of yours, perhaps—well, it might get me an interview with the great man rather quicker."

This was artful of Bob, and the colonel at once assented. In a minute more Bob had said good-bye, and jumped into a cab just in front of the windows. The colonel shrugged his shoulders, and lit a cigar in order to ponder in comfort why Bob seemed in such a deuce of a hurry. Why did *he* want to visit Raphael? What were I.O.U.'s to *him*? He was rich enough—most people were who did not deserve it; at least, whose deserts were not equal to those of retired warriors and "reduced" consuls. But he might have been speculating or gambling, as he did in the good old days. "If he has, why hasn't he taken *me* into it?" the colonel thought, with injured feelings. He was glad, however, to have seen Bob again and made up their previous quarrel in an informal way.

One of the most surprising events in Mr. Raphael's professional career occurred on this same day, and shortly after the interview between the colonel and his morning caller. Mr. Raphael was a little old gentleman who might have been taken for a City missionary, from the cut of his seedy black coat, if it had not been for a rather wicked leer in his eye, denoting general suspicion of all human motives, which made him look more like the regulation detective met with on the stage. He had had financial dealings with all kinds of men and women. He had, as he called it, "floated" lords as well as clerks; the peculiarity of his process, however, being that most of the craft which he launched were so heavily freighted *that they sank soon after leaving his office*. The mysteries of compound interest were no mysteries to him. His heart

was not uncharitable. If he could help a fellow-creature by lending to him at a moment of difficulty, he always did so, where the security was satisfactory; and the subsequent repayment of the loan, with double or treble its original amount added, merely represented to his mind a proper recognition of the service performed,—gratitude taking an equitable and substantial shape.

But to-day the young-looking, well-dressed man who called upon him, and who sent up the card of a previous client, came on an errand of an altogether unique character. It was not absolutely new that people should visit the City office of Mr. Raphael to pay him money; they were obliged in the long run either to come or to send. But the peculiarity in this case was that the gentleman who was ready to pay was going to do so for somebody else; that he owed no cash whatever himself. "Will you excuse my asking?" he said to Bob, holding his quill pen in his hand, ready to write the release from the debt. "Are you a relative of Colonel Vane's?"

"None whatever."

"H'm! curious—infernally curious!" he muttered.

"My check will do, I suppose?" said Bob. "You've met me before, Mr. Raphael. You know who I am?"

"Certainly, certainly. Great pleasure to meet again. Check will do very well—very well." The money-lender saw that Bob was respectable. Beyond that he neither knew nor wanted to know anything about him.

"Let's see," said Bob; "five forty isn't it, at five per cent? Five fives, twenty-five. Forty pounds, two more. Twenty-seven. Twenty-seven and five forty, make five sixty-seven. That's right, ain't it?" Bob sat down, and took out his check-book.

"Quite right," said Mr. Raphael, smiling and rubbing his hands. "Add ten pounds more, seventy-seven, for fee for release. Five seventy-seven. That'll be perfectly correct."

"Are you sure?" said Bob, laying down his pen. "Look here, Mr. Raphael," he went on, "I think I was reading for the bar when I last had the pleasure of meeting you. You were a witness in one of Cruickshank's cases—he's a judge now, you know."

Mr. Raphael bowed, and wondered what this little piece of autobiography had to do with his check.

"Well, I'm not at the bar now," Bob observed, looking

Mr. Raphael in the face, as if he expected the information to be of some interest to the money-lender. As the latter said nothing, Bob proceeded quietly, "No; and perhaps you would like to know where I am. I'm at Scotland Yard—a deputy-commissioner."

Mr. Raphael's smile grew a little more sickly than before, and he stopped rubbing his hands.

"Don't you think this fee for release, as you call it, is a mistake, eh?"

"Bless me!" said Mr. Raphael, briskly. "Why, of course it is. There's nothing in your agreement with me—I mean Colonel Vane's agreement—about the fee, is there?" Mr. Raphael took up the I. O. U. to look at it, just as a matter of form. "No; nothing about it. You're quite right. I generally insert the clause about payment for release, but I haven't in this case, it seems."

"It seems not," said Bob, dryly.

The check having been written, and the I. O. U. duly cancelled, Bob rose to go.

"And if I can be of any use at any time, Mr.—Mr.—I forget your name—but if I can be of any use to you or your friends, I should be proud to do anything. You see, I know Dr. Maturin pretty well—it was through him that Colonel Vane got off with that low rate of interest—but I should be glad to accommodate *you* at exactly the same rate. Not a penny more," Mr. Raphael ended, in a burst of generosity.

"Thanks. We may want you some day. If so, I'll send somebody down from the Yard to fetch you."

Mr. Raphael, having seen Bob's back disappearing down the staircase, thought to himself that he did not want anybody from "the Yard" to fetch him under any circumstances. It was one of the last honors he was ambitious of receiving. Bob's words were ominous; they made a shiver run down his spine. He warmed himself by adding twenty per cent beyond his usual rate of interest to the next client that appeared at his table.

Meanwhile, poor Netta, sitting at home at Bayswater, was in a mood of doubt and hesitation and general unfamiliar unhappiness. She still was quite unable to recall to mind what it was that had made her feelings towards her lover undergo such a change. Bob's visit had cheered her momentarily. *But very soon she sank again into the curious condition of brain in which the accident had left her. It was as if there*

were some enormously important conundrum waiting for her to guess, and that she could not guess it. Mrs. Vane was beginning to be alarmed, in spite of the comforting assurances of the Bayswater doctor. She decided to act on the medical advice, that the patient must be taken away for a change as soon as possible. The colonel quite agreed.

Next day at breakfast Colonel Vane received by the post a letter which caused him at first amazement, then disbelief, then wonder, melting at last into surprised joy. It was an anonymous communication, and that sort of letter is generally not satisfactory, but this one was more than satisfactory. The colonel could not altogether conceal his feelings from his family. But he refused to tell what his letter contained, and directly breakfast was over he drove straight down to Raphael's. There he found that the news of the debt being settled was not a hoax; it was quite correct. He also learned from Mr. Raphael, who now was rather proud of Bob's call, as no evil results to himself had occurred from it, that, "a nice gentleman, a commissioner at Scotland Yard," had been the financial liberator.

The colonel took a cab back home, exultant, and, finding his youngest girl alone in the dining-room, at once began the pleasant process of unburdening his soul of its secret.

"What d'you think, Netta?" he asked excitedly. "You know I told you about that debt? You remember, eh?"

"I remember something about it," she replied languidly.

"Maturin promised to pay it off when he married you. Now you recollect, eh?"

Yes. That *did* bring it all back to her mind. Was *that* why she had become colder in her feelings towards her lover? she asked herself. She remembered she had not liked it at the time. But something else too, had happened; something—something— She was utterly incapable of fathoming what that mysterious something was.

The colonel prevented her sinking back into lethargic puzzling.

"It's paid!" he almost shouted—"all paid! It's not owed any more. I don't owe it. You understand? Isn't that splendid?"

A flush of joy brightened Netta's face. But she said in a moment, "It depends on who has paid it, papa."

"Ah!" replied the colonel, cunningly. "Who do you think?"

The colonel's manner made her at once conclude that it was Dr. Maturin. She sighed, and looked vaguely round the room, as if other subjects were of more interest, and that one pained her.

"Who do you think?" the colonel repeated. "A confounded generous fellow. He can afford it, too. I can't. Who is it, Netta, eh?"

"I am sure I cannot tell."

"Mr. Robert Betteridge."

Now Netta looked up, really astonished, and a gleam of new pleasure shot from her eyes. She had, much rather, if the relief were to come, that it should come from him than from her lover. She wished to be able to contemplate Hartas Maturin and her engagement with him from an impartial standpoint, uncomplicated by money obligations. She had not forgotten the unpleasant effects on her mind of the colonel's revelation of the debt, and the promise to repay it, conditional on the marriage taking place. She was glad that there would now be no necessity for her father's freedom from a galling bond to be dependent on her marriage, though she still felt that Hartas Maturin, as a man of honor, *could* not have meant to buy her father's assent to the match. No, even though confused as to what Hartas really was, she did not believe that. But then, it was odd and quixotic of Mr. Betteridge to come forward in this generous way. There was a touch of the disagreeable even about that.

"Why has he——?" she began.

"Ah! just so!" the colonel interrupted. "Why has he done it? Pure generosity, Netta, I expect. A nice trait in Bob. Then he can afford it, as I said. I told him about it, you know" (she did not know, but had guessed how Mr. Betteridge's knowledge of the debt had come about), "and no doubt he didn't like my being under an obligation, especially to Maturin. He doesn't believe in Maturin, you see. No, no, dear; don't answer. You do, of course; so do I—that is—oh yes, of course I do, in most matters."

"In most matters!" Netta at any rate was not inclined to have her lover depreciated by others.

For the next few hours the sense of Mr. Betteridge junior's *kindness*, and of her father's freedom from the loan, gave

Netta a pleasant mode of occupying the time and her own thoughts. She liked Bob Betteridge. There was an unpromising openness about him. She felt that he would have been just the companion she would have enjoyed in those happy free old days in Lesbos, when life seemed more simple, and gayer, and less full of perplexing problems.

Problems! Ah! what was that one that had been distressing her? Why, it was all as clear as day! The vision, the dream, stood out on her brain written in letters of dazzling light!

The effect of the happiness produced by Bob's generosity, and of having her thoughts entirely taken away from brooding over the puzzle, was that it was a puzzle no longer. The reaction of mind had set in. Netta began in an agitated way to walk up and down the drawing-room. Yes, step by step she went on in thought, recalling each incident of that tremendous vision which had come upon her when lying in the doctor's house at Manor End. No wonder she had felt uneasy! No wonder she had felt perplexed and doubtful as to her relations to Hartas Maturin! What *did* that visitation of the night-time mean? Was it a warning, a revelation, or a sick fancy bred of the horrible room where she had been placed? This was now the great question with her. To answer it was the pressing necessity of the position, the imperative demand made by her spiritual nature. She could not settle the matter that night, for it was late. But next day—next day—next day. Ah! something should happen next day, to throw light on her future path; to make or to mar her chance of lifelong happiness.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A RUDE AWAKENING.

CORRESPONDENCE, which he had neglected for a long time, under the stress of love, and lately of anxiety, engaged Dr. Maturin's attention for half the next day. He intended, however, to drive over to Bayswater late in the afternoon, stay to dinner with the Vanes—he presumed they would invite him—and see with his own eyes what progress his *fiancée* was making towards complete recovery.

Her manner, as we know, had disturbed him. But on reflection he had easily persuaded himself that the apathy arose from her bodily condition, and that time was all that was needed to bring her back to her previous animated, merry, and trusting state of mind, and to her love for himself—time, and not to see Mr. Bastian again; that the doctor considered essential. He would not guarantee any woman's continuous affection, or even sanity, when brought under that mysterious dominating influence whose effects even he himself had experienced.

This morning Dr. Maturin was blithesome. He was looking forward to his interview with Netta in the afternoon, and pleased himself by fancying her receiving him with an outburst of love all the more pronounced because of her previous coldness. He had himself recovered from the shock of seeing the woman-angel whom he adored lying injured and senseless before his eyes. And he could not refrain from inward self-congratulations upon the quiet victory that he seemed to be gaining over Mrs. Vane's prejudices, or, at least, over her power to injure him. He had been really surprised that the girls had been allowed to keep their jewelry presents. He felt that very soon he should have advanced far enough to ask Netta to fix their marriage day.

It may not be believed, but it is nevertheless the fact, that in his own inmost heart and soul Hartas Maturin felt that he was growing a reformed character! He was no longer what moralists called *bad*—a condition which certainly had disadvantages in this life, where moralists are powerful; he was good, a recruit to honesty, almost a convert. He acknowledged that in the past there were incidents which—well, which interfered with a retrospective claim to saintship. But now it was different. He was actually deceiving himself into the belief that the old devil in him could be exorcised in a moment, in a flash. If he had been asked as to his feelings about sudden conversions, he would have laughed scornfully at the idea of long-rooted habits of mind and body being uprooted in a day. Now love was making him strangely unscientific and foolishly optimistic about himself.

And it was the new Janet who was to perform this miracle of causing the leopard to change its spots. Certainly she could do it, if any woman could. He knew quite well *that in gaining her love he had gained a jewel without price; he admired the powerful influences of her unsullied*

purity; he would have been content, he thought, to live henceforth a life of virtuous deeds, basking in her smile, drawing inspiration from her lips.

It must not be inferred that there was not honesty in these thoughts of his. Love is a powerful transmuter of the baser metals in a man's soul into pure gold. The gold so formed may afterwards retransmute itself into baseness again; but the change is real, for as long as it lasts. Dr. Maturin had got as far as a genuine regret for his past—a regret that surrounding circumstances had had so much power over him (this was how he put it to himself) as to necessitate one ugly and many questionable deeds. He had not given up shifty plottings and vindictive hates; in fact, he did not even know that that would have been how some of his thoughts and feelings would have been described, so strong was his egotism, and so completely were they part of his nature. In the main, however, he felt that he was becoming a candidate for any paradise that might exist. He knew it was his real, his passionate love for the lovely being who had returned his affection which was acting as the better inspiration to his life. He was turning to innocence, growing towards the light, in her influential rays.

His intention being to start about four for Bayswater, he was astonished when, half an hour before that time, the servant announced to him—he was sitting in his study, ruminating—that the Miss Vanes were in the drawing-room.

“The Miss Vanes! Both of them?”

“Yes, sir. They asked for you.”

Dr. Maturin wondered what on earth had brought them over to Manor End. At any rate, Netta must be almost well again to endure the journey. In five minutes he had bestowed the care he always did on his personal appearance, and had gone to meet his visitors.

He noticed how pale Netta looked. It was awkward having to greet her in her sister's presence. He could only take both her hands in his, and press them fervently.

“How are you, my darling?” he whispered.

“I am better,” she said simply, returning his gaze. “I have come about something important. Mildred dear, will you leave us for a little while? I wish to speak to Dr. Maturin alone.”

Dr. Maturin stared in astonishment. Then he said—

"Suppose we leave your sister here, Netta, and go ourselves into the dining-room?"

But she had already taken Mildred towards the door.

"Don't stay too long, dearest," her sister whispered; "it is not quite proper."

"What I have to do to-day," Netta firmly answered, "has nothing to do with what is proper or not proper. I *must do it*."

When Mildred was gone, she went back into the middle of the room. Dr. Maturin stood opposite her, with a curious expression on his face. It was half a smile, denoting love, and surprise, and wonder what Netta would say or do next.

She did not sit down; and there the two stood, with only a chair between them. She said—

"I preferred the drawing-room, Hartas. What I have to tell you about seems to have happened here."

"Happened here? You are talking enigmas, darling." He did not like this beginning.

"It is an enigma to myself. I want you to explain it," she replied.

"Explain what? What is there to explain?"

"I have come to tell you. I am longing to tell you. It has been weighing on my mind. It was something I saw in my sleep, I suppose, when I was so ill—in that room. I thought I ought to tell you. At first I could not remember anything about the dream, although it was more vivid than any I have ever felt. Indeed, I don't think I ought to call it a dream."

"Is that all?" the doctor said. "Nothing worse than a bad dream? Darling, why so troubled about it?"

"I remember it all now. Perhaps you will understand why it impressed me so terribly. It seems—pardon me, Hartas, for saying so—but it seems like a message; a message," she went on, "telling me I ought not to do what you wish."

He took two steps towards her, and placed his hand on her arm.

"Not marry me!" His voice was deep, with infinite passion in it; but she looked at him firmly, and said—

"No, Hartas, unless you can explain all."

"Explain a dream!" He burst out laughing. "Come, *little woman*, sit down here. I will sit opposite to you. You

look horribly tired. And I will be your riddle-reader, your interpreter of dreams and visions."

"I hope you may be able to interpret it," she replied wearily. "Yes, I will sit here. And you must listen attentively—don't interrupt, and I will tell you all. I was lying on the sofa in your consulting-room. I must have fallen asleep, or become unconscious. There was nobody in the room but my mother. I was thinking, before I fell asleep, of your dead wife, because her picture was on the mantelpiece; and at first I thought it was my picture, because you know you said I was very like her; and afterwards I was sure it could not be mine. And then I heard Dr. Snow, when he came in, tell my mother that that was the room in which"—she paused for a moment, and then went on hastily—"in which your wife died."

Dr. Maturin could have ground his teeth with rage at Dr. Snow's twaddling tongue. He cursed Snow in his heart, but at once turned his attention to Netta's story. He did not in the least degree know what was coming. But he felt serenely confident that a mere dream could not be of much moment in his life. Still, it appeared to have had a disastrous effect on her mind, which it would be his business to counteract after he had heard it.

"I dare say I was nervous and weak, and the picture and Dr. Snow's words disturbed me more. When I fell asleep, if it was sleep, I thought that I was living over again something which I had been and done long before. It did not seem in the least like a dream. It was as vivid as any reality I know about. I was as sure that I was really acting over again scenes in which I had formerly played a part as I am now that I am in your drawing-room."

"Dreams are often very vivid, especially when people have had a shock, and are weak," Dr. Maturin interposed, in a soft voice. "What was this dream of yours like?"

"You must not talk of it as a dream. It may have been a message—a message from your dead wife. But if so—Oh, Hartas, I cannot understand why she should put such dreadful thoughts into my mind!"

Dr. Maturin began to feel uncomfortable as to what was in store for him.

"Go on, darling," he said. "I am sure I can easily explain it all."

"It seemed so strange," Netta proceeded slowly. "You

will think it strange of me to say such a thing. But I must tell you what happened, and it really seemed that I had been married to you for a long time, and was living here, in your house. I was playing the piano, too—that piano there. It was evening at first, and the shutters were closed, and there was a bright fire burning, and the lamps were lighted. Everything was cheerful and warm. I was playing the piano, and you were bending over me, Hartas; but you looked so different. You were younger, I am sure, and you had no love in your eyes—only a pretence of love. Your manner was affectionate, but I could see that it was only manner; and then you went out of the room, and I became very sad, and wondered why you had changed so—why you no longer loved me as before.”

“That alone would show the utter unreality of your dream. I am never likely to change in my feelings towards you.”

“It seemed in the past, a long time ago. I could not understand it at first. Then I went to look for you, and I went into the dining-room and found you there; and then we had a quarrel—oh, Hartas, it was horrible!—and I could not tell what it was about, only you wished me to do something that I would not do. And then presently everything became cheerful again; for you seemed to have forgotten the quarrel and your anger. Everything was so bright and cheerful and happy, and you were so kind—so very kind, Hartas. Forgive me for what I am going to say now; it is my duty to say it.” She went on in a low voice, “I became suddenly convinced that you hated me, and that you intended me to die—that you wished me to die; but though I saw death coming on me, I was powerless to move out of its way.”

Dr. Maturin had become very white, and quite silent. He tried to smile disdainfully when she paused. “Well?” he said.

“We had come back into the drawing-room, into this room. I cannot tell whether it was at once, or after the lapse of days; time seemed not to matter at all. We were talking together, when you asked me to go and fetch something for you—something, I don’t know what, which you or I had left in your consulting-room. I went, obeying you implicitly, and not fearing anything. But the door through which I had to pass was locked, and I could not open it. I turned the handle several times, and then I became convinced *it was locked*, and that you had the key. So I came back *here to ask you for it*. But, oh, Hartas, you met me with

such a face! If I had doubted before that you meant me ill, I could not have doubted it then. You seemed amazed to see me still alive; you seemed to shrink away from me and to hate the sight of me. It was terrible!" Netta buried her face in her hands, overcome at her own recital.

As for her lover, he was living a lifetime in those few moments. He had expected a happy afternoon at Janet Vane's house, but instead she had come to face him as his accuser. She seemed to be gifted with an awful power to dive into the past. Unspeakable dread seized him as to what she would say next. For an instant he had an impulse to rush from her presence; to escape the mystery and horror of this extraordinary unburial of the almost forgotten details of his old crime. Do what he could, he could not bring himself to utter a word, a sound. He knew his voice must betray his agitation.

In the few moments he had for thought, he clutched at the idea, "There must have been a spy watching us! That Mrs. Longstaff must have seen more than she said. She must have told Mrs. Vane; Mrs. Vane told Netta; Netta has dreamed it all again." He would cling to natural explanations to the last.

Yet the very next words that were uttered shook his confidence in this theory of a spy; of Mrs. Longstaff having watched and listened and heard more than she ought.

"You could not take your watch from your pocket. Oh, you had such a struggle for it; it was almost ludicrous. And when at last your hand was forced to the pocket—it really seemed as if it were forced there by some fiend inside you—and you had placed the watch on the mantlepiece, you sobbed, Hartas! I heard you sob as though your heart would burst. And your face was pale. I thought you were ill. But then, as I looked in your eyes, I saw the same dreadful wish to hurt me—and you seemed so determined—I felt I could not escape the evil you intended me. You sent me out of the room again, giving me the key. I think you kissed me, and called me 'darling.' But I knew—I knew so well that I was going to my death—and I felt no great fear, only wonder how it would come on me, and sorrow to leave all my friends behind. I passed through to your consulting-room, and then I noticed that there was a powerful smell, sweet and strange; and as I walked to the window I felt drowsy, and I thought 'Oh, I must get out!' But I could not find the door, and the

same stupor overpowered me, and I sank on the floor, and a mist crept over my eyes, and I remember just thinking to myself, 'Then, *this* is death,' and I felt nothing more. But I became conscious a little later, acutely conscious. I seemed to be all soul, and I passed out of the room without walking; I seemed to tread on air, and I glided through doors without knocking; and I went into the drawing-room, and I saw *you*, and called your name, but you did not answer—you did not see me. And I waited, surveying you and everything round quite calmly. All my perturbations and doubts seemed over; it was just as if I had passed through the gates of death to some quiet land."

She stopped for breath. She had been talking quickly and excitedly.

"You do not speak, Hartas!"

Ah! how could he speak? She had told him of things which he believed none but the first Janet could have known. He stared at her face with glassy horror in his eyes.

"Then you rose up from your chair. You seemed oppressed. You went out into the hall and listened, and then came back into this room. And there was a cat——"

Dr. Maturin shifted in his seat. Netta paused for a moment, thinking he would speak.

"A cat that loved me, my own cat, a favorite. I have never seen one like it; I never had a favorite cat, but I had one then. And as you went back into the doorway of this room, the cat was waiting, watching you—just there, and it first came to you and fawned on you, and then it gave a scream, and sprang up at your hand and tore it. Oh, it was terrible! And I was spirit; I could not interfere. I felt miserable, and as I looked at the horrible scene—for you could not shake the creature off—it all faded, faded away, and the next thing that I remember was waking, lying on that couch, as I had been placed, feeling such a weight on my forehead, and feeling, too, that something awful had happened—something which I *could* not recall to mind. I tried and tried, but it would not come back; and yesterday it came back for the first time, and I felt I could not rest till I had seen you, Hartas. Speak, do speak! Tell me what this means."

Dr. Maturin did not even hear that appeal. His mind was lost over that hateful past. It was wandering in the dismal avenues of memory. Netta's words had recalled the scene of

the tragedy, as if it had been yesterday when it had happened.

"Oh, Hartas dear!" she exclaimed, with infinite, yearning tenderness in her voice. "I did believe in you so; I *do* believe you are good; I still believe it. *Why* did I have this awful dream? Was it a dream? Oh, it was so real, so fearfully real to me!"

His silence seemed to her horrible. She burst into sobs, and threw herself at his feet, clasping his knees.

"Oh, Hartas, Hartas!" she wailed, "explain it; tell me all!"

Still he stared fixedly, as if his eyeballs were paralyzed.

"Oh, Hartas, Hartas!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands together imploringly. "Tell me what it is that moves you so. I ought to know. You have no right to conceal it from me. You made me promise to marry you, but I cannot, I cannot, if I doubt you—if I am uncertain about you; if I think you have done something wrong long, long ago."

Still that unaccountable silence; still that intensely long-ing look, that stricken pallor of the face.

"If you have done anything wrong," Netta went on, in a low, sobbing voice, "be sure, Hartas, it will haunt you. It is better that you should miss happiness than be wicked. It would be better for you to lose me, though I am sure you love me, or did love me, than to lose your own soul. Perhaps this is your punishment, to lose what you valued too highly; and I have been punished too. Oh, Hartas!" she broke out, in a torrent of inexpressible emotion, "if you love me, explain all this! Tell me, tell me the meaning of my dream!"

There was a long, long pause. Neither spoke. There was no sound but Netta's sobbing. Dr. Maturin sat bolt erect in his chair, staring at the mass of golden hair buried at his feet, waving over the footstool on to the floor. It seemed that he was really bereft of utterance, though he tried to articulate something.

Soon Netta raised herself from her prone attitude. If Dr. Maturin would not answer her appeal, womanly dignity told her she must not abase herself before him. Perhaps he had ceased to love her. She did not believe it, but she must try to prove the mystery. Her mind flew to the most unlikely thoughts.

"Hartas, is the explanation this—that you love somebody else?"

No answer. Yes, at last there was one—a slow mechanical shake of the head; that was all.

“Or that you have wronged somebody, as Mr. Bastian said? That part of the vision *cannot* be true; you cannot have been so wicked as *that*. But some other injury you may have done—to your first wife, or to another woman? Oh, tell me, Hartas!” she burst out again. “Confess it all to me, and I will forgive you. I may not be able to marry you; indeed, it is impossible now for the future to be the same for us as we hoped; we cannot be so happy as we hoped. But it will do you good to tell me all; it will do your soul good; It is what God intends by allowing us both to be punished like this. We must not be obstinate and strive against it. We must not think we know better than He knows. He can heal you, Hartas; He is the Great Physician, and you will be forgiven—I mean, if you have done wrong. ‘Though our sins are scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.’”

A pause.

“We can live our lives separate from each other. It will be right for us, and though at first it will be hard, we shall be happy in knowing we are doing right. Others have had to deny themselves happiness; why not we as well?” She began to talk wildly. “I will become a sister of mercy; I will go into a convent. You must try and wipe out the past by being good—by doing good things. And, Hartas,” she added, as the sobs came again thickly, nearly choking her voice, “it will come true—that hymn will come true; we shall meet again some day—in the far-off abode we shall meet—in the harbor—our souls will be guided to the heavenly harbor—at last!”

Poor Netta broke down completely. Womanly dignity was cast aside. She was weak from her illness, and the strain of the thoughts and anxieties of the past few hours had been too much.

Up till now Hartas Maturin had sat like a carved idol of wood, without movement. But at this moment the strong forces of his nature gathered themselves together, and insisted on action.

He had had such a shock as, in the history of our race, has probably come to no human being before. The years which had passed since his crime was committed had brought with *them the feeling of absolute security from anything like*

suspicion, much more from detection. He was perfectly convinced that what had passed between his dead wife and himself, before the crime, was unknown and un conjectured by any human soul. The idea that now, after seventeen years, he should be suddenly arraigned, told all the buried secrets of his heart, and called to account, was horrifying. That Netta should be the instrument of the mysterious revelation was still more terrible. And his inability to explain her extraordinary acquaintance with every incident of that almost forgotten tragedy without ascribing it to some supernatural agency, in which he had always disbelieved, was an added horror.

No man had scoffed more than he had done at the idea of retribution awaiting him. He had hugged himself in the sense of immunity from the ordinary criminal's commonplace fears. At the world and its boasted detective powers he had laughed, in private, over and over again, and especially at its stupid want of discernment of what it would call a hypocrite beneath a moral polish. And he had been right. The world by itself *was* powerless against him. But how if its forces were supplemented by others of which he knew nothing? His retribution, he felt in those bitter moments of mental perturbation and spiritual agony, was coming on him from forces he had derided, and from a man whom he had tried to despise—Bastian. How else *could* that marvellous resurrection of the details of the murder be explained? At all events, he was not in a condition to frame any other explanation.

But even now, in a brute fashion, he clung to the old hope of marrying Netta Vane. He could not at a sudden call surrender *that*. She might be—yes, at that instant he really believed she was, the embodiment of his dead wife's spirit, the murdered woman come back to curse him and to haunt him. What then? He *did* love her above all things. Perhaps *she* had not realized what her revelation meant; perhaps this awful idea of her soul being the old Janet's had not crossed *her* mental horizon, as it was branded on *his* in characters hard to be effaced.

He rose from his seat slowly; he staggered forward, and stoop opposite her. With an agonized look of doubt, he gazed into her eyes to see what was written there. Alas! how horribly they recalled the dead woman's. In unaccountable alarm he shrank back for a moment. Then, holding one

hand over his eyes, he stretched out the other appealingly, and said in a hoarse, stifled voice—

Netta dearest, you will not desert me ? ”

“ It is not I that desert you, Hartas,” she answered firmly. “ It is your own past that has made a barrier between us.”

“ My past ! ” he almost shrieked. “ What do you know of my past ? What can anybody say against me ? ”

“ I was told how you quarrelled with your poor dead wife ; I was told it, and I would not believe it. But now—but now—oh, I believe it, I see it all now ! What my mother said was right, Hartas ! ”

There was a pause. Nobody but himself could have heard her low, horrified whisper—

“ Then it is really true ; *you did kill her !* ”

He recoiled a step, and before he had time to think what to do or what to say, Janet Vane had torn the diamond ring from her finger, thrown it on to the table near her, walked quickly to the door, and was gone. Another minute, and he heard the front door close. He had no doubt that the sisters had left his house, never, never to re-enter its crime-stained portals. Overcome with the concentrated agony of the situation, he dropped swooning on to a chair.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM AT FREEMANTLE HOUSE.

HARTAS MATURIN did not go out that afternoon as he intended. He was, no doubt, exercising a wise discretion. For it was to a certain house and a certain family circle in Bayswater that he thought of directing his steps, and perhaps he would not be so welcome there now as he expected to be. He was, as we know, a classical scholar, and that day there had been presented to him an entirely new version of the story of Alcestis. A loved wife returning from beyond the grave to a disconsolate husband is one thing ; but a hated wife returning to her murderer is another. And it is certainly bad taste. For such a length of time has elapsed since the occurrence which we, and Dr. Maturin too, know *something of*, that nobody could rationally expect the flame of affection to last till now. If Alcestis had waited nearly

twenty years before she came back, would Admetus have received her with rapture? Would he not have wished her, and Heracles too, back in Hades—especially if the jolly widower were thinking of another wife? And if Admetus had himself with his own hands sent Alcestis to Hades, how then?

So quietly lolls the master of the house that we may without offence doubt if he *is* exercising a discretion in that matter of not visiting Bayswater this afternoon. We may doubt if he has the power to choose what he shall do just now. He might sit to Pheidias as model for a graven image of Despair.

The room is growing darker as the hours creep on, but he does not seem to notice it. *Her* presence was light and radiance while she was here, but she is gone. No, the diamond in the ring on that table near him, though a gem of the first water, cannot illuminate so large an apartment; it only twinkles a little brighter as the dusk increases. He has hardly moved since she has gone, yet he is awake; fully conscious, we should say. Ah! we might even pity him, so strangely altered is he, so old his face looks now. But in this room we cannot pity him. And the birds hop on and off the window-sill, looking in, as they did on an afternoon we remember many, many moons ago.

Surely it must be worse for him than it would be for ordinary men, the shock of this discovery. Ordinary men believe in something or other, but he had believed in little or nothing—and had acted on that disbelief. And the law of nature is that those who are the worst—because moral—disbelievers, when they are forced to acknowledge the mysterious presence of an outside Power, make the foolishlest believers. If his whole life had not been an acted defiance of divine laws, he would be better able now to judge what are divine laws and what are not. Cynicism and denial of a moral code are, after all, not the healthy normal habit of the soul. Faith in a right and a wrong is. The man who has disbelieved so long from false grounds, when nature or circumstances beat down his old doubting views, will believe in the first thing strongly presented to him equally wrongly. The spring back to the current trust in an unseen universe and an unwritten law throws him into the arms of the first strong doctrine that he comes across which professes to give any definite tidings of these things. A defiance of such be-

liefs is unnatural even for the strongest natures. Our morality, even our metaphysical faith, is, more or less, that of our fellows. The view ingrained by heredity and impressed by outside influences *must* have weight at last, and when it does, great is the possible reaction!

For example, here is a man now confronted with the fact that this woman whom he loves has told him of events and sayings, and even thoughts, which none but he and his dead wife knew, and he can discern no glimmer of an explanation but to suppose that the soul of the dead has indeed entered the body of the living. His is not a nature to stop half-way. If he is really convinced, as he lies outstretched there, a numb, motionless figure, that that was his old dead spouse that revisited him a few hours ago, that spoke to him with the voice and gazed at him with the eyes of Janet Vane—if he is really convinced of *that*, it is the reaction from a life of cynical disbelief in the supernatural. And it is a little disturbing to have all one's old ideas suddenly reversed.

But, man alive, bring your old cynicism to work! Rouse up your clever, sceptical forces! *Has* she told you things that none but you and your dead wife knew? Think! Perhaps Mrs. Longstaff was peeping in through the windows, and *saw* all that was proceeding within. No, the windows are too high above the gravel outside. Then perhaps she took a ladder, Hartas! And all that knowledge of every word and every thought of yours—why, you only have to imagine that the old lady was hiding behind chairs, and listening behind doors, and spending most of her day in cupboards, and flattening her large person under the carpet and the boards, to account for all, or most of it. Improbable? Yes; but then we know, you and I, how the improbable is often the true. Is there no other explanation? Ah, you are not in a state to form one! You accept, or all but accept, the derided theory of re-incarnation; and you are now drinking deep of the horror of it when it is applied unexpectedly to your own case.

And who will deny that there *is* horror in it? Ghosts, impalpable ghosts, are bad enough; but to find a spectre in our darling, an apparition in the flesh and blood of a living woman, that *is* startling. Yes, you are thinking to yourself, "*Even if I could and did marry her, she would forever haunt me.*" I could never look in that once-loved face with-

out the dread of the lips speaking something which I thought eternally buried." Yet there is still that terrible conflict in your soul which was shown by your conduct just now. You long to clasp the form of Janet Vane; yet you dare not, for it may be Janet Maturin that you would clasp! You love her, and you loathe her. She attracts you by the power of her beauty; she repels you by the unspeakable terror that you feel of a soul risen from the dead to punish you.

We do not doubt the punishment. You *did* love her—oh, how you did love her! That makes the tragedy all the greater, the punishment all the more severe. If you had felt but a passing inclination for this beautiful and tender-hearted girl, the wrench of eternal separation would have been less. But, to do you justice, your heart was wrapped up in her. You thought she was even making you good. You lost disbelief in virtue when you believed in her. She was ideal goodness, and in loving her you were coming to love goodness too, so you thought. To have to lose her! And you must acknowledge that, be the explanation of those words of hers what it may, it would be what the world calls a false move to marry her; a false position to be in to have her constantly at your elbow. It is a terrible retribution, this of having your angel made loathsome to you in a moment, not by anything that she has done—for to others, you admit, she will still be as lovely and as desirable as before—but because of your own past offense. She is your embodied crime. Naturally you do not wish to be bound to such a grim reminder "till death you do part."

It is like that afternoon seventeen years ago, only there is no wind now. Has time no reality? Have all those years shut up like a telescope, and is it really that same afternoon? And you sitting there, are you waiting for the moment when the deed will be accomplished which will set you free from an incubus? We might almost imagine this to be the same scene, Hartas. It is plain that you are not unconscious. You stir now, slightly, and grasp that arm of the chair in your powerful hands. What is it that moves you?

Yes, no doubt, if this woman who has severed her fate from yours, who left that ring near you as a token of separation, is indeed Janet Maturin come back again, you *have* read the riddle of the universe wrong, and that is always provoking. Those who misread the conundrum of the Sphinx, *Hartas*, you will remember, lost their lives; you lose your

love, perhaps to you more valuable than life itself. The universe *is* on the side of goodness, after all? And there *are* hidden things of the soul, beyond your ken, revealed now only to crush you?

You writhe in your seat. Ha! what new thought? That one that we mentioned just now—that, though forbidden to you, others will still find Janet Vane pure and beautiful, and of all maidens most desirable? It is a bitter, a heart-searing thought for you. She seemed so certainly yours, beyond all chance of mishap. She conquered the illness, and you rejoiced that the only cloud between you and happiness had disappeared. Who will marry her now? No, that—that is maddening. You rise hastily from your seat. At that moment, all unconscious of any tragedy, or any disturbance of the calm tenor of her humble ways, enters the housemaid with a lamp. It is her business, as we know, to close the curtains and make the room bright and pleasant at the approach of night. But hardly has she placed the brilliant orb she carries on that small table, than she catches sight of your face, so livid, and the veins in your forehead standing out like blue cord. For a moment she halts there, irresolute; then with a stifled, "Oh, oh, oh!" she hurries to the door, and flies downstairs, no doubt to tell strange tales in your kitchen, Hartas!

What do you care? Servants are nothing to you now. You have formed some determination. By your face it should be a desperate one. You pass into the well-lit hall, thence into your own private room, where you unlock a drawer, and take out something that glistens; you then empty the heavy contents of a small round tin box bodily into your pocket; again reaching the hall, you take your hat and stick mechanically; looking neither to right nor left, you walk, as if in a trance, to the door, and, slamming it behind you, step forward into the gathering summer night.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A NIGHT WALK.

AFTER such a scene as Dr. Maturin had quite unwillingly, gone through, men do not regain their equipoise at once. The nerves of the versatile doctor were firm, but delicately poised. It would be months before he could hope to recover—if recovery were really possible—from the wrench of that bitter parting. He felt that his existence was bound up in his love for Netta Vane. He was not in a state to reason calmly, and the deep waters of agonized thought and feeling went over him. For the first time in his long and serene career he felt hopelessly submerged. But even so he would make one struggle. If Netta Vane could not be his wife, she should never belong to anybody else, least of all to that maleficent magician sitting plotting in his East End hermitage. At the thought of Bastian Dr. Maturin ground his teeth together. His morbid imagination formed a plot on Bastian's part to gain Netta for himself. Yes, he must be in love with her, and he was using his diabolical powers to entrap her. As he left his garden gate behind him, Dr. Maturin swore a silent oath in his soul that *that* plan should never come to anything; he would prevent it.

He stopped a moment to think. His brain was unwontedly confused, and he put off the task of thought till a more convenient season, when he should feel more himself. He then set out to the foot of the hill, intending to take a cab there. But he walked on and on, and could not find one. At last, after walking a mile, an empty four-wheeler came sauntering by. The doctor hailed it, and got in, ordering the driver to direct his vehicle to Whitechapel High Street. The slow progress and the jolting irritated him beyond bearing. He put his head out of the window, and shouted "Faster! faster!" with such a scream that a vagrant policeman rushed up to ask what was the matter. The doctor swore at him, and told the astonished driver to drive "*like a devil, or he would be shot like a dog*."

The threat had the effect of stopping the vehicle altogether. The driver got down. The policeman gave his thumb a jerk towards the cab interior, and said—

“What’s up? Is he drunk?”

“Mad, I think,” responded the cabman.

And certainly Dr. Maturin’s pale and contorted visage might have warranted the latter supposition. He still had sense enough, however, to recognize that he was placing an obstacle in the way of his own revenge by getting into a street row. He opened the carriage door, descended quickly, and said to the policeman, in the tone of authority he knew so well how to assume—

“I hired this fellow to drive fast, and he goes like a damned snail. Here’s something for you;” and he thrust a sovereign into the policeman’s hand, which immediately went up to his helmet. “And here’s your fare, cabby.” It was more than his fare. Cabman and policeman were left standing in the road together, marveling exceedingly at the ways of a man who parted with two sovereigns as if they were dirt.

“A good day’s work,” said the cabman. “*Who* the deuce can he be?”

“The Prince of Wales, I should have said, only he ain’t got his face,” said the policeman.

Meanwhile Dr. Maturin had dismissed the incident from his mind. He determined to walk the rest of the way; it was only a mile or two to Whitechapel. He could not trust himself to talk to anybody just then. He could not treat cabmen as rational beings. They were instruments to his revenge. The slightest delay infuriated him. He was walking now as if issues of tremendous moment depended on his speed.

By about half-past ten o’clock he had entered the street where Bastian lived. He had no difficulty in finding the house again. He ran up the steps, knocked at the door, and then felt in his coat-pocket. Yes, what he wanted to find was there all right.

There was no unnecessary delay in opening the door, but for all that he was already stamping with rage at being kept waiting. The moment it was open, he thrust himself in, rushed past the astounded little maid, and without knocking stepped *into* the door of Bastian’s department. It was empty and *quite dark*, except for the light of an outside lamp coming in.

Dr. Maturin now turned to the little servant.

"Where is he?" he said breathlessly.

She had somewhat recovered her senses. Her spirit to defend her master and her master's property was, as we know, excellent.

"Mr. Bastian ain't at home, sir," she replied.

"Where is he, then?"

"But I don't think I ought to tell you, sir, you look so—so strange like."

Dr. Maturin felt that he could with pleasure have crushed the life out of this little creature. But it would not have helped him in his object. He sat down on a chair in the passage, and said—

"I am a friend of your master's. Don't you remember my calling here some time ago?"

"Yes, I do, sir; and a lady—oh, such a beautiful lady!"

A spasm of pain shot across Dr. Maturin's brow. The innocent remark of the little maid tortured him. He said almost fiercely—

"The beautiful lady who came with me wishes to know where Mr. Bastian is now. You can have no objection to telling *her*."

"Oh no, sir! and I didn't know you came from her," the girl replied. "He's away from London now."

"Away from London! Where?"

"It's a place a long way off, I think, sir. But he left his address on a card, if anybody wanted to see him." She groped to the mantelpiece, found the card, and brought it out.

Dr. Maturin held it up to the light. "View Cottage, Leith Hill, Dorking," was written on it.

"Are you sure he is there now?"

"Yes, sir; quite sure."

Dr. Maturin walked to the door, and went out quickly, leaving the little maid as surprised at the abruptness of his exit as she had been by his sudden entrance. Gentlemen were queer folk, however, and she could not hope to understand their ways.

Dr. Maturin's resolution had not relaxed. He was still doggedly determined to seek out the author, or supposed author, of all his suffering and bring him to account, though ghostly armies of supernatural beings were to stand in his way. As to consequences, he was not in a mental condition to consider them. He did not see beyond the moment of

ecstasy when this Bastian should be lying dead at his feet. He could think "What next?" when that first engrossing duty was performed.

It was too late for trains. He could not wait. Neither would he trust to a cab to help him on his road. He would walk the distance to Dorking. Dr. Maturin knew it could not be more than twenty or thirty miles, and he was an excellent pedestrian. Often and often in his earlier days he had walked fifty miles in the day. He felt elated at the idea of trusting solely to his own powers, of receiving no help from conveyance or steed of any kind. The night walk would help to clear his brain and steady his shaken nerves. He set out boldly and resolutely on his long journey. Meeting the Whitechapel Road, he struck into it, traversed Aldgate High Street and Fenchurch Street, crossed the Thames by London Bridge, and arrived in the Borough High Street. When he reached the meeting-place of six roads called the Elephant and Castle, he stopped for a moment to consider the best route to take. Should he strike for Croydon and Redhill? No, that would be out of his way. He would go the straight road to Dorking, through Epsom and Leatherhead. Once arrived at Dorking, he knew Leith Hill was not far off, and he could easily find out where the cottage was situated that he was in search of. So he took the right-hand road which led to Clapham. He went at a good swinging pace, for the exercise exhilarated him. He did not now feel crushed. He felt that his terrible resolution made him the master of circumstances. Though Netta would not marry him, though he knew he could not marry Netta, he yet loved her enough to rescue her from a plotting quack. That was the way in which this sovereign egotist justified his hatred of Bastian to himself.

When he had traversed four miles of dreary streets, well lighted, especially at the corners where the flaming gin-shops stood, and had come out on the open space of Clapham Common, he began vaguely to wonder what he should do when he had killed the man. Kill himself? He did not value life much now. He was not a coward.

"Five bullets for him, and the sixth for me, perhaps," he said over and over again to himself.

Another hour brought him past Merton Bridge. But he was not clear of London yet; the houses still stood on each side of the road. He gave up thinking of what would happen

when he reached his journey's end. He tried to banish Bastian from his thoughts. He had made his decision ; there was no need to be remaking it. He began to count the number of cottages that had lights in the windows. Then at length he seemed to have got clear of houses and cottages, for there were fields on both sides of the road, and the great trees bordering the path threw dark shadows on the highway. Only a scattered cottage here and there, till he descended a hill and came suddenly into the little village of Ewell, sleeping quietly amid its roadside streams and ponds, all bathed in peaceful moonlight.

Now there was a pretty continuous line of houses till Epsom was reached. It was far past midnight, and the Epsomites were a-bed ; hardly a single light flickered behind a blind all along the desolate High Street. The doctor was glad when the reverberation of his footsteps on the flags ceased, and he was once again walking on the gravel between hedges, and clear of walls. A country town at dead of night is never very inspiring. To one with such thoughts in his head as Dr. Maturin had it was almost maddening in its silence.

Next came a long stretch of real country, for the five or six miles before Leatherhead was reached. There were parts of the road where the tall trees on either side were so matted together in their upper branches that not a ray of light could come through, and pitchy darkness prevailed. A faint glimmer a long way off sometimes told where the avenue ended ; it was like the orifice at the end of the tunnel. At other times when the road curved, there was no such distant gleam, and progression was a matter of faith, not of sight. Dr. Maturin stepped on unhesitatingly, through darkness as well as through moonlit patches of the road. Soon he became impatient, and began to run. He took his hat off, unbuttoned his coat, and scudded along, dropping again into a long swinging stride when tired. What a belated rustic would have thought of this strange figure rushing on through the quiet night, nobody can say ; Dr. Maturin met no soul on the road. He had the country to himself, it seemed.

Leatherhead is a picturesquely situated little Surrey village, with a pretty river and an old bridge, and one long main street sloping down to the stream, with its houses devoid of any pretension to architectural uniformity. Dr. Maturin might at other times have noticed how even the ugliest houses took an eerie beauty in the uncertain light ; how the

old High Street became transformed under the moon's magic touch into a fairylike and unsubstantial place. But now he had no time and no thought for study of the picturesque. He knew his road diverged somewhere here, and he walked slowly down the white pavement of the narrow street, looking for a sign-post. Ah! there it was. "To Dorking and Horsham." He paused a moment under the post, and took out a flask with which he had provided himself, filled with brandy. After putting it to his lips for a few seconds, he started off again, at the same swinging pace. Soon the little gray church and the pretty walled villas were left behind, and he had descended to the level of the river Mole, which flows by the side of the road for some miles. He walked quickly and confidently now, for he knew Dorking was not far off, and his unshaken purpose would soon be accomplished.

It was becoming much lighter in the sky as he passed under Box Hill, and, after a short spell more of walking, came into the Dorking valley and entered the main street of the sleeping little town. The church clock was striking four. Dawn was already come; in the trees there was the awakening twitter of birds. If it had been daytime, Dr. Maturin would have now inquired his shortest way to Leith Hill; but not a soul was stirring in any house. The green windows of the old White Horse Hotel all had their blinds down; the hostelry looked pure and peaceful with its white walls and comfortable red-tiled roof. Should he wait till some workman going early to his labor appeared in the street? He sat down on an old low wall, part of a sunk fence near the county police station. He noticed the words "County Police," and smiled sardonically. He was going to give them something to do.

No, the idea of delay was horrible. His consuming desire for vengeance drove him like a goad. He would not allow Bastian to enjoy a minute more, of that life which to himself had turned suddenly so unspeakably bitter, than he was compelled to give. Not a shadow of compunction crossed his mind at the thought of the crime which he contemplated. There was only an intense joy throbbing within his brain at the anticipation of his near triumph over the man who had marred his happiness and trampled his love into the dust. "Legions of the devils who are his friends will not serve to *save him from me.*" he said fiercely and aloud, as he leaped

from the low wall, from which his legs had been dangling, on to the road. He knew that Leith Hill was somewhere beyond Dorking southward, and he struck into the Guildford Road, intending to bend round to the left when he should come upon a turning in that direction. "Twelve miles to Guildford," the sign-post just outside the town said.

He must have missed the next turning, occupied with wandering thoughts. And he seemed to be walking slowly; and now and then he lifted his hands to his head, and then clenched his fingers into his palms till the blood showed through the white skin. Memory and imagination were at work, showing him in instantaneous mental photographs what his betrothed had been to him only two days ago, and what she was to him now. And when these vanished, there came an even more distracting vision—what she might be to some one else. It was by a tremendous effort of will that he braced himself up, and firmly banished these agonizing thoughts, which interfered with the business he was engaged in. He had left Dorking two miles behind before he bethought him of the necessity of turning southward. He took a small country lane which led uphill, and which soon degenerated into a mere bridle-path. Steadily mounting, he passed through one or two fields, and suddenly dipped down to where a tiny stream was making its way between stones and high banks with a subdued prattle. There were water-weeds growing where the stream became a succession of still pools; where the damp rocks cropped up from the bed, the glossy fronds of liver-wort spread over them; and now and again a little waterfall intervened, and a sheet of bright water fell through lush foliage into the clear basin beneath. Dr. Maturin was very practical this morning, or he would have admired the exquisite scene. Now he merely stooped down and drank greedily of the falling water, cooling his throat, parched with the dust on the roads.

A few fields further on, he first came on a human being. The sun was up, and the laborers were lazily ambling towards the scenes of their daily work. A fellow, with hat slouched over his eyes, smoking a pipe, told Dr. Maturin his way to Leith Hill. "To the top, leastway." Did he know View Cottage? "Noa, not he." Where a man called Bastian lived? "Ah! he'd heard speak of a Mr. Bastun. But didn't rightly know what he'd heard about him, or where he lived." Dr. Maturin passed on, and the laborer turned his

head to look after him. What was *he* doing out so early? He looked as if he had tramped all night.

Soon a real road was reached, and still the same upward direction. He passed through a village of about a dozen small cottages, most of them perched on the side of a hill crowned with dark pine trees. It looked like an Alpine village. Another half-hour, and Dr. Maturin had come to the inn which stood at the head of the pass; where Bob and Staunton had once, long ago, dismounted; whence Bob had set out to have his first memorable encounter with Bastian. Dr. Maturin did not know how near he might be to his bourn. He guessed, however, that he could not be far off.

Up to this point he had been the victim of overmastering passion. He had no more thought of consequences than a wild beast that has long eluded the pursuit of hunters, and stands at bay at last. To all intents and purposes he had been converted into a dangerous wild beast, the only sort left in these islands—a man without pity and without fear. His subtle intellectual part had been burned up in the fierce flame of his animal passions, and he was hardly more than a blind instrument of vengeance wielded by the malignant forces of the universe for the destruction of a supposed rival who, compared with him, was a hero. Bastian was actually what Hartas Maturin might have become. There were no heights to which the latter might not have risen. Now it seemed as if the only question remaining was, how far or by what agency he would fall.

He was now, however, beginning to a certain degree to regain possession of his old cunning. He felt that he had been perhaps rather foolish in so openly visiting Bastian's East End home. Why had he allowed proofs of his purpose to accumulate at his heels? At all events, he would be more prudent now. His brain seemed weighed down; he still could not think continuously; yet he even began to fancy that Netta might have found out about the murder by some other means than—— But no! The comforting thought—the natural explanation, if there *were* one—eluded him. Still, if he could not reason, he could be prudent. As he halted near this inn, it occurred to him as very desirable that he should conceal his features as far as possible; that he should look as little like the gentleman in needy circumstances as might be. He also was so curiously conscious of the *change in himself*—from a conquering man of the world to a

desperate vagabond full of wild passions—that he was even afraid a like change might be written on his features, and that people, seeing him, might take him for a madman, and so, after all, his revenge might be missed.

He stepped aside into a field, took off his coat and rolled it in the soil, smirched his hat and boots, and tilted his hat over his forehead. He also took out a cigar and lit it. It would serve as a sort of breakfast. Then he hobbled with a limp into the bar, and blew a cloud of smoke about his face before he asked, in rustic accents, of a sleepy servant, "Which might be the way to View Cottage?" She had never heard of such a place, and stared at her interrogator with blinking eyes. He was not of the appearance usually associated with tramps. Yet he bore evidence of tramping; and why was he astir at that hour? He cut short her cogitations by mentioning a name which she *did* know.

"Oh, Mr. Barstyun's cottage! Up on the hill. It's over on the other side from here. He's a kind gent, but a rum un, he is."

"Which is my shortest way?" Dr. Maturin asked. He blew another obscuring smoke-cloud from his mouth, and closed his lips tight. He felt he was near the end now.

"Go along the high-road, and turn up the footway to the right when you've got on to the other side of the hill, after the pond."

"Thank ye. Is it far from here, the cottage?"

"Not more than ten minutes."

The strange figure disappeared into the road.

A quarter of an hour later, and he was treading warily on the dry twigs and leaves of a little wood of larches, at the other side of which could be seen the white front and thatched roof of a small house. Behind it towered a sandstone height, clad, where the escarpment was not absolutely precipitous, with patches of heather. The hollow where the house stood had been scooped out by a little stream, which, running for ages, had made the glen, and now ran trickling between the larches and the garden-gate to the weald clay hundreds of feet below. The early morning sun, rising in an almost unclouded sky, was touching the tops of the trees, and shining full on to the little clearing where the cottage stood. It lit up the quaint old brick chimney, which seemed the solidest part of the fabric. All the walls were of wood, with here and there a black beam jutting beyond the white face;

the thatch was old, and looked dry—dry as the leaves that Dr. Maturin crunched beneath his stealthy footsteps, in the little coppice that, generally damp and oozy underfoot, now called out for rain. There was a pretty porch—the prettiest feature about the place—covered with creeping jessamine in flower. A winding gravel path led from the garden gate to the hidden door beneath the porch. From a distance Dr. Maturin could see no sign of life. No smoke issued from the chimney. But one of the small upstairs casements, with its small panes, was flung wide open. He advanced obliquely, so as not to be in view from the windows.

There was something chilling in the silence and the absence of breathing life. This, then, was the home of the "Nineteenth-Century Wizard," as he had called Bastian. It was not the sort of place which a magician would choose for his dwelling in the "Arabian Nights." Dr. Maturin was conscious of a return of the kind of terrible dread which he had before experienced, the dread lest this man might be capable of raising spirits from the grave, and imprisoning them in other human forms. He still could not frame any passable theory how Netta could have known what she did know without demoniac assistance. Here, at all events, whatever the explanation might be, he was in presence of the man who had begun the process of making Netta disbelieve in her lover; who, whether gifted with marvellous clairvoyant powers, or merely an arch-plotter, had been at the root of his own soul's tragedy. If not in the presence of Bastian, he was before his house. He must, if not in it now, return at some time, and soon.

How to gain admittance? The boldest plan would be the simplest. With nothing but joyous hatred at his heart, Dr. Maturin walked quickly to the garden gate, stepped briskly between the flower-beds along the gravel-walk, and knocked at the closed oak door with his fist. There was no knocker or bell. The door must be very old, for the shake he gave it brought down a little avalanche of dry wood-dust. Now he took his half-smoked cigar from his mouth, and thrust it heedlessly in his coat-pocket. He could not afford to give his enemy time for preparation. As no response came from the interior, the doctor put his hand on the old latch, and raised it; the door was not locked, and he stepped inside.

There was a narrow passage, and a door opening out on *each side*. At the end of the passage it broadened, and Dr.

Maturin saw the beginning of a spiral oak staircase, with carved balustrade. The doors of the two rooms were open. He looked hastily round that to the right hand. It was plentifully lined with old book-cases, containing, apparently, still older volumes ; but the most remarkable point about it was that the table was covered with a litter of little boots, caps, pinafores, coats, frocks, and shoes. Dr. Maturin just noticed that the room was empty, and then dived quickly under the low doorway into the room opposite. Ah, that was the kitchen. Evidently a meal had taken place recently. There were a number of plates and saucers on a plain deal table, guiltless of any table-cloth. There was the ghost of a fire in the huge fireplace, which was surrounded with pillars of rudely carved woodwork, and ornamented with a jutting mantle of the same material, which seemed centuries old. The furniture of the place, however, did not interest the intruder. It amazed him to see a number of chairs drawn up to the table, or pushed away from it. It looked as if Bastian had been entertaining a large party. And that last meal, was it supper the night before, or breakfast that morning ? On that would depend whether or no Dr. Maturin would find his foe sleeping securely upstairs, or whether, even at that early hour of the day, he had gone out. It was as yet hardly more than six. Surely Bastian did not take his walks abroad quite so early.

Ceremony did not stand in Dr. Maturin's way. He began to climb the winding staircase. He held his revolver in his hand. The precaution was needless. A moment's contemplation of the upstairs floor convinced him that he was the only occupant of the deserted cottage.

He came down again to the kitchen. If the cottage were deserted now, its owner would come back to it, he felt sure ; he had only to wait. Waiting was hateful to him just now, when his purpose had to be accomplished. But to go out and search for his victim all over the country-side would be ridiculous. Besides, thirty miles had made even Dr. Maturin tired. He threw himself into an old armchair that stood close to the window, and which creaked horribly as it felt his weight. From that post he could see anybody approaching the garden gate. He had taken his dust-covered coat off, and flung it on a chair some distance off. Before him, on the wooden window-seat, lay his weapon, ready for use. There was a smell of burning cloth, he thought. No ; probably

that old fireplace smoking. Arrived now at the end of his journey, his determination carried out, and his enemy practically at his mercy, Dr. Maturin's heart beat equably, and his nerves lost their tension. He felt quite at his ease, even reposeful. He knew what to do, and he intended doing it. It was the first moment of anything approaching release from pain that he had felt for nearly twenty hours. The reaction was dangerous. He closed his eyes, and sank into the placid slumber which, even when the mind is not innocent, waits upon bodily fatigue.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NEAR CONYHURST HILL.

UP in the hazel woods near Conyhurst Hill—the neighbor of Holmbury Hill—three men were busily engaged already in their day's work of cutting straight hazel walking-sticks for the London market. After cutting them, they pared off part of the bark, and all knobby excrescences. Thus finished off, they brought in the magnificent income of threepence a dozen; and a dozen, by the custom of the trade—which in this case meant the caprice of the metropolitan employers of rural labor—when counted, numbered thirteen. When it is said that they were busily engaged, it must be understood that the expression did not apply equally to all three. Job, a rustic with a red handkerchief throttling his neck, and little to say for himself at most times, was incomparably the best cutter. Mike, a country colleague, was the best talker and the worst cutter. The third man engaged in this healthy, though not very profitable business was nicknamed "Soft Harry." He worked by fits and starts—had bursts of uncontrollable lopping energy alternating with periods of equally irresistible laziness. His companions bore with his presence, though they despised him. He lopped on sufferance. He had a mental peculiarity, which was that he was three-parts an idiot. The other quarter of his intellect had splendid ideas, and fancied itself remarkably *shrewd*; but it was too often overpowered by the idiotic *three-quarters*.

Just now Soft Harry had desisted from his work. He had been idle for quite five minutes, when his companions noticed a broad grin suffusing his features; he began to chuckle audibly.

No unnecessary ceremony was used in conversation with this despised village scatter-brain.

"What be you grinnin' at, ye fool?" Job asked.

For answer, Soft Harry pointed in the direction in which he was looking, and said—

"Such a fine red cloud!"

"What cloud, ye fool?"

The two men hardly condescended to turn their heads to see what had caused the idiot's jubilation. When they did, they also noticed a cloud in the sky tinged with red. It hung low down. Not being very well versed in atmospherical matters they at first put down the phenomenon to some freak of the sunlight. Then they observed that the cloud was much lower than ordinary clouds are—hanging just over the top of the hill in front of them. Then a few sparks rose into the air in the centre of the cloud. Job and Mike looked at each other. Simultaneously they exclaimed—

"It's a fire!"

"Near by, too," Mike added.

They gazed for several minutes in gathering wonder and excitement. The rural mind is slow to come to conclusions. Its movements are like those of nature around it, leisurely. "Where can it be?" was the next question that they began to ask each other. They had all three put down their pruning-knives.

A thought of gloom occurred to Job.

"The woods theirselves ain't afire, sure-ly!" he said.

This was a horrible idea. It meant a possible destruction of their source of summer wages by the act of God.

The dullard of the group did not seem frightened by the prospect. He cracked two of his fingers as a preliminary to an observation, and then said proudly—

"I know where it be!"

"You!" Mike and Job both ejaculated, in strong contempt. Then, for the fun of the thing, Job asked pityingly, "And where be it, then?"

"It's not the woods, it's the cottage—the cottage with the man in it, down by the stream."

"There ain't no cottage," said Job.

"He means Mr. Bastian's," said Mike, "in the hollow. Maybe he's right."

The excitement of seeing the murky cloud growing more and more lurid, and the sparks increasing in volume, was too much. There was pleasure mingled with the excitement, too. Work must be definitely put aside. A fire did not occur every day.

The three men set off running together. The fool came last.

When they reached the road which skirted the range of hills, they saw other men running. There were certainly going in the direction of the cottage. A few hundred yards more of rushing through tangled briar-bushes and over furze-clumps and down into sandy hollows brought our trio right in view of the little larch wood. Now the flames could be distinctly seen through the thickly-sown trunks. The cottage itself was on fire. Of that there could be no doubt now.

The room on the left of the porch glowed like a furnace. The other was bright, but not so bright. Flames darted from the windows now and then, accompanied with dense masses of smoke. The creeper on the porch and up the walls was already shrivelled. The dried woodwork, of which the place was built, was crackling and blazing grandly. So rapid was the progress of the fire, that by the time the three woodcutters had made their way to the group standing in front of the house the thatch was already alight, and the two tall bricks chimney stood like pillars in the wreck. Their stalwart forms were seen every now and again through the blinding clouds of smoke, like giants tied to the stake.

There was a crowd—a crowd it would be called in that sparsely peopled district—of between ten and twenty men and boys gathered round. Two or three empty buckets were lying near. An attempt had been made to stay the conflagration, but the only available water supply was that afforded by the little trickling hill stream, now not half full, and quite shallow. At one point, close to the house, it trickled into a large wooden butt sunk in the ground. This gave water to the occupants when they required it. A few buckets soon exhausted this, and the flames had easily triumphed over such a sprinkling. It was recognized that there was no hope for the house; it must burn on. There was an awed silence among the men, who stood at a respectful distance staring at the destruction they could not avert.

"Whoever's inside, he's a cinder," said one man.

A chorus of voices joined in a denial that anybody was inside. The house was uninhabited, as a general thing.

At this precise moment Soft Harry made a fool of himself. He burst out crying pitifully. Mike gave him a kick, and told him to "stop that blubbering." Some bystander, more merciful, asked the cause of his sorrow, to which he replied, between bursts of tears—

"Ah! I'ear'd 'em; I'ear'd 'em all a-singin'—so heavenly, it was. And now" (sobbing) "they be all burned up."

Some who heard his words looked at each other blankly. What! had Mr. Bastian been there with a following of children? His habit of housing poor London children at his cottage was well known. But he had not been seen there for weeks. The idiot was cross-questioned. How long ago was it he heard the singing in the woods?

"Ah! yesterday," he sobbed. "I'ear'd 'em a-singin' 'mid the heather. Gatherin' berries they were, and a-singing, and a-jeerin'" (he meant cheering) "like mad."

Then the children must be in the burning building! An awful thought! Blank horror filled every countenance. As they talked in excited and horrified whispers, there was a succession of quick reports from the inside of the burning building. A laborer ducked his head. He had distinctly heard a bullet whizz past him; so he stoutly swore. What could it mean?

"He weren't the sort to have a gun inside," was the general verdict. Nevertheless, the ring of spectators retreated somewhat further. As for saving life, if living beings had been inside, the idea was absurd and hopeless.

But if the children had perished, then Mr. Bastian had perished too. Then all began to say what they knew of him; and most of it was sheer praise.

"'E be a reel gentleman," Mike said enthusiastically.

"Better nor that. 'E be a *man*," said another.

"'E *was* a man," corrected a third. "If he be inside theer, 'e bain't nothin' no longer."

"Ugh!" said Job, shaking himself as if he would shake the idea out of him.

"So kind 'e weer. Look at 'en wi' them pore kids!"

"Ah! ah! ah!"—grunts of general approval from the bystanders.

"He used to put *sperrit* into a man by talkin' to un' he

did," said a farmer-like man who was standing by—"not that he gave much; but a man *felt* better after a talk wi' un."

"Ay; but he was proud, too."

"Nay, not proud. Only he was *master*, he was; and he knowed it. One couldn't speak quite easy-like to such as he, nohow."

Not having very much material to consume, and meeting with nothing that impeded its progress, the fire soon burned itself out. There was a brick frame-work round the lower windows, part of which was standing, and the old chimneys were still there. Otherwise the whole place had been destroyed. The entrance was blocked up by *débris*. As yet it was not safe to venture too near. The fire still blazed up occasionally. Some adventurous soul, who peered into what had once been the entrance passage, and got his face scorched in so doing, asserted that he saw a half-charred beam fallen transversely, and under it was something that looked like a body. This intelligence confirmed the fears of the men assembled, whose numbers were constantly being augmented by fresh comers. Mr. Bastian *had* perished, then. There was no longer doubt about it. Probably the poor children with him had been burnt or suffocated upstairs in their beds.

There was a burst of loud weeping from Soft Harry. This time nobody thought of rebuking him. One man in a low voice said—

"We shall never see *him* again."

"Right," said another, gloomily.

"He give my sister her crutches last winter," said the first speaker.

"He didn't give *me* nuthin', but he altered my wife, I know," replied the other; "made her a different creetur', he did. Knocked the drink craving right out of her."

Soft Harry thought of something else. His thought was of the children.

"The little uns," he sobbed—"singin' so heavenly. Like dickey-birds; like God's dickey-birds. We shan't hear 'em singin' again."

Ah! but what was that? Something that seemed like a direct contradiction of the idiot's words. For there *was* singing, distant indeed, but perfectly audible—voices that sounded like those of children, borne from far by the breeze,

and rippling in and out of the hollows and slopes of the hill. They seemed to be coming nearer. All stopped talking, and listened intently. Could it be some mocking, fantastic echo magnifying small sounds into the semblance of a childish chorus? As the onlookers listened, they drew closer together. Now and then amid the happy singing there was a burst of wild laughter. Suddenly, on the other side of the larch wood, high up above the cottage and the trees, a troop of veritable children came dancing and running round the shoulder of the furze-clad hill; and in their midst was the tall figure of a man.

Everybody had been so thoroughly convinced that Bastian was dead, that at the sight of him in the flesh they shrank back in momentary dread. There was something mysterious about him, they felt, and in country districts superstition still holds sway. If it had been night-time, probably the boys among the crowd would have taken to their heels. Now all held their ground, waiting to see what would happen next on this morning of wonders.

Bastian himself no sooner caught sight of the smouldering ruins of what had once been his home, than he strode quickly ahead of his little troop, came up to the group of rustics, and asked—

“Who did this?”

The tone and the question would have been enough to convince any doubter that the occupant in person stood before them. At once there were proffered explanations from half a dozen tongues. He imperiously silenced all but one, singling out the intelligent, farmer-looking personage as spokesman. From him all that was known of the origin of the fire was soon learned. It was little enough, certainly. Bastian turned round, and waved to the children to stay where they were. In spite of curiosity, they obeyed. Their blithe singing and laughing had been turned to low, uneasy whispering. Some of the little girls were even crying to see the pretty cottage laid low. It seemed like a sudden plunge into misery from the paradise they had been enjoying. The necessity of a return to the real Hades of London streets loomed grim before them.

Bastian folded his arms, and gazed sternly at the ruins. How the fire had originated he could not guess. He had taken all his little friends that morning to see the sunrise from *Leith Hill*; they had started early, after a hasty meal.

Only a small fire had been lit in the great hearth. Could *that* have been the origin of the calamity? As he pondered, he was roused by a cry. Some men had ventured into what had been the entrance. They were drawing something out. He approached nearer. It was a burnt and blackened human form, from which the flesh had been nearly consumed, yet here and there patches of cloth shrouded the limbs. It was a ghastly spectacle, for the face had been charred past all chance of recognition, and pieces of flesh still clung to rags of burnt clothing. One arm and the fingers of one hand had had every particle of flesh removed from them, and looked like fragments of a blackened skeleton.

Bastian knelt down by the side of the dead man.

"Poor fellow!" he said reverently. "Who can it be?"

The rustics had gathered in a respectful ring round. No-body ventured a conjecture.

"Some poor tramp, perhaps," said Bastian. "He may have been tired, and taken refuge in the cottage. But then, how did he get burned? Why did he not escape?"

The farmer suggested that perhaps he was suffocated before he could make his way out.

"And a speark from the fire may 'ev popped out," said Mike, who was dying to say something brilliant.

"What's this?" said Bastian.

Something heavy had fallen from the bit of cloth that wound round the body. He picked it up. It was a gold watch. The discovery caused a sensation among the ring of spectators. Tramps don't as a rule wear gold watches.

Meanwhile our friend the fool had done what fools usually do—he had been exploring. He had burnt his fingers in the ashes; but he had come across something that amused him. He stood on the scorched grass-plot in front of the garden, clicking the something. Then he laughed very heartily. Then he clicked again. One or two went up to him to see what he held in his hand. They brought it to Bastian.

"Is this yours, master?" they asked.

He turned, and looked at it. It was a begrimed, smoke-blackened revolver, with six chambers. He smelt the barrels. There was a distinct smell of powder about them. The mystery seemed to grow more mysterious every moment.

He had thought, when the watch was found, that it must have belonged to some innocent tourist wandering among

the Surrey hills; but why did he carry a deadly weapon? Bastian decided to keep his own counsel. He put the revolver in his pocket, rose hastily, and said—

"What's done is done. The house is burned down. And I have all those children to house and look after. Only two days since I brought them down from London. I cannot send them back yet."

"And no need to," said the farmer. "I can take in one or two for a bit. And some of these here'll take in others, I'll be bound."

"I'll take one," shouted Job, from the outskirts of the throng.

"And I! And I!"

Soon the little band had been distributed among the neighboring cottagers, until their real host could make some definite arrangement for their housing. A shrill yell of pleasure went up from the youngsters when they were told they were not just yet to be packed off to their urban haunts.

Dr. Maturin's slumber had been deep. Never had he been so mentally and physically worn out. He had not thought of sleep, but sleep came to him. Nor had he given a moment's attention to the burning cigar in his coat-pocket. The slight scent of burning in the room may have lulled his fated senses still more. From whatever cause, he had relaxed the vigilance which ought to have been his at the moment when his vengeance was about to be completed.

And so it came about that Dr. Maturin never took his revenge.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE "REWARD OF IT ALL."

MANY months later, a group, whom we may perhaps recognize, was sitting on a lawn at Reigate, which is also not quite unknown to us.

It was a delicious May day—a day in a month which, for once in a way, was not wintry and cold; and, as a natural consequence, "all things that loved the sun were out of doors," and intended remaining there.

"The very healthiest place in the world is London."

This paradoxical remark emanated from a gentleman blessed with a mustache and most regular features, and who in other respects, bore a remarkable likeness to our old friend Staunton.

Everybody was too lazy to contradict him, so he proceeded, after a pause—

"It's far healthier than any Greek island." This was intended to draw one of the Miss Vanes into a controversy. It merely resulted in a satirical remark from Bob Betteridge, who was sitting with a sheathed sword by his side—he had brought it up from "the Yard" by special request to exhibit it to his fair friends—in one of the most comfortable lounging-chairs that his father's residence could boast. He did not look at all martial himself.

"You should write a book on the subject, and call it 'Staunton on Climate;' get some law-publisher to print it, and Shanks to put a preface, and it would sell like wildfire."

"Mr. Staunton ought to visit Lesbos before he talks of any English climate," said Mrs. Vane.

"By-the-by, how's the work on 'Wills' getting on?" said Bob, in a tone of interest.

Mr. Staunton replied generally that law-books never had much of a sale, except in the profession; but he believed it was in its second edition.

"You should bind it in yellow backs, and pretend it's a sensational novel," said Bob, irreverently.

Mildred felt roused. "I have read some of it, and it is *most* interesting," she remarked.

Bob laughed. At another time he might have been surprised at this championing of Mr. Staunton's legal productions by Miss Mildred Vane; but, as she and Mr. Staunton had been engaged for a fortnight past, he could no longer feel surprised at any such remark. The engagement had received Mrs. Vane's entire approval, and, as a natural consequence, Colonel Vane's also.

Mrs. Vane was one of the most cheerful factors of that garden group now. She had become great friends with Mrs. Betteridge, who admired her splendid common sense, and loved to talk of matters which interested them both equally—poor Janet Maturin's sad fate and lovable character, especially; and on Dr. Maturin they also thought alike, though he was seldom mentioned. As a subject of conver-

sation, his name had been tacitly tabooed, except for a few days after the severance of Netta's engagement to him, and the news of his terrible death. But it cannot be denied that Mrs. Vane herself had found the world go more pleasantly with her since he was removed from it. She had come much closer in feeling and sympathy to her younger daughter ever since the latter announced to her the surprising intelligence that "all was over between her and Dr. Maturin." A barrier seemed to have been removed; Netta's affectionate nature came back to all the greater love for her mother when those anxious motherly doubts about her lover's character had been revealed to her as true. They had kept from her as long as possible the news of Dr. Maturin's death, for fear it might make her seriously ill. When she *was* told, she took the intelligence with strange quietude. For some weeks she moved about the house without energy in her steps or merriment in her voice. A month at the seaside had somewhat restored her. And now her old gayety of spirit was returning. She had had a terrible lesson, and a dreadful awakening from a delusive dream of true love. But anybody who watched her, as she sat at her mother's feet, listening dreamily to the conversation that was going on between Mrs. Vane and Mrs. Betteridge, would not have considered her life blighted.

The mistress of Southwold Court looked up when the remark about Mr. Staunton's book was made, and said, with a slight sigh—

"Ah! I wish you had ever written a legal work, Bob."

"I had too much pity for my fellow-creatures—and for myself," that gentleman retorted.

"And you did write a book once, did you not?" Netta Vane now joined in.

There was general incredulity at this amazing statement. When, where, how, and why had Bob ever written anything, except official minutes? And if so, why had he kept the fact to himself? The younger Miss Vane had to explain herself.

"Well, I am sure papa told me he once made books.

A quick glance and smile from Staunton roused Bob to intervene before more mischief was done.

"I have to fill in no end of entries in the books at the Yard. No doubt that's what the colonel meant," he explained.

Old Mr. Betteridge, who was sitting a yard or two away from the rest, had dropped his newspaper to listen. He now broke in, with pompous authority in his tones—

"I never heard of a *gentleman* writing books," he said. "No offence to you, of course, Staunton; law-books are different from others, and somebody must write *them*, as long as the law goes on, and that'll be forever, I suppose."

Mr. Staunton murmured a hope that that prophecy might prove true.

"Yes, but Bob, now," went on the City magnate, "he might have been a gentleman on the Stock Exchange; making a fine fortune by this time, too—that he might. He's thrown away his chance. And the law now. He took to that; but he didn't make much of it, or much out of it, either. And what's he doing now? Why, it's the first time I've ever heard that a Deputy Commissioner, or whatever you call it, of police is a tiptop gentleman. And a tiptop gentleman I want my son to be. Of course, he is one in appearance and all that"—laughter—"yes, and *he* wants it, too, I imagine. There now!"

The subject of this plain speaking apparently was listening with good-natured disdain. He had heard something of the same sort so often before from the paternal lips. He only took the trouble now to reply, for the edification of everybody present—

"The gov'nor doesn't understand this sort of thing. If he thinks the Stock Exchange is more gentlemanly than Scotland Yard, why, I differ from him, that's all."

"I shouldn't have minded," said Mr. Betteridge, still immersed in his own line of argument, "if there'd been any chance of a man risin' from Scotland Yard and becoming a nob afterwards. But there isn't. What I want to know," he added, in a tone of assured argumentative triumph, "is how a man is to rise from the Yard, as Bob calls it, to a decent position, a gentlemanly position, anywhere else—on the Stock Exchange, now, for example, or in the City generally? Eh?"

Bob did not give a direct reply.

"I don't know whether the Yard leads to the Stock Exchange. But operations on the Stock Exchange often lead to Scotland Yard."

The retort had the effect of amusing the rest of the audience, and of confirming Mr. Betteridge in his previous opin-

ions. When his wife attacked Bob, he always felt bound to defend him. He claimed a monopoly of the right to depreciate his son. And it may be suspected that he only made a pretence of doing so himself. He clinched the argument now by what he thought a question admitting of no plausible answer whatever.

"How d'ye expect Lord Freshwater ever to come and see you? He'll think you're a common bobby!" There was genuine scorn in the City magnate's voice as he uttered the last words.

"There's no such thing as a common bobby, father," Bob replied quite amiably. "There are ordinary constables. It's better to be a bobby than a black-leg, anyhow. And, as a matter of fact, Lord Freshwater called on me only yesterday."

"Eh? He did, did he?" replied the austere father, in a tone of real interest. "Well, that was kind of his lordship, that was."

"Very," said Bob, dryly. "He came to me because he wanted a fellow squared whom he'd been pitching into when he was drunk, I fancy. The fellow was threatening to summon him."

"Ah! And of course you helped him?" Mr. Betteridge's deference for the aristocracy would have led him to compound any number of felonies in their favor.

"Not I. I told him," Bob replied, assuming a rather lofty and official tone—"I told him it wasn't the duty of people at the Yard to square anybody."

There was a distinct murmur of applause, slightly checked by Mr. Betteridge's presence, at this example of Roman virtue on Bob's part. Netta Vane had been listening with deep interest to the little sparring match, in which Bob had come out so obviously the winner. Like "the ranks of Tusculum" in Macaulay, she "could scarce forbear to" clap her hands at the bloodless victory. But everybody's attention was drawn off by the arrival, in hot haste, of another visitor, who half walked, half ran, across the lawn till he came panting into the centre of the little group. It was Colonel Vane. Something, evidently, had happened, and something of an usual and unexpected character, too. In answer to his wife's mute appeal for information, he took off his hat, wiped his forehead, and began—

"Yes—I knew you'd want to know about it—all of you, I

mean. It's very interesting—interesting to me, at least ; and I've been kept waiting such a time, too."

"It's an appointment !" shouted Mildred, in great excitement. "Oh, papa, I am so glad ! What is it ? Where is it ? Tell us at once, please."

"Is it an appointment ?" asked everybody at once.

"Just so. An appointment. She's guessed it. And a rattling good one, I think." Colonel Vane's face beamed with delight.

"Ah !" said prudent Mrs. Vane, "it may turn out a disappointment, like the last."

"A disappointment, my dear !" said the colonel, in surprise, his views of the universe having taken a sudden turn in the direction of optimism. "Why, I've been to the Colonial Office and seen Smithers myself ; he's the Colonial Secretary now, you know. It's all right, I assure you."

"Is it in England ?" asked Bob, in a hollow voice. He had roused himself into a sitting position in his chair.

"No ; Cyprus," said the colonel, still smiling.

"Cyprus !" exclaimed Mrs. Vane, looking rather blank.

"Cyprus !" echoed Mildred and Mr. Staunton, looking at each other with melancholy countenances.

As for Bob, he ejaculated "Cyprus !" in a broken tone, and sank back in his seat with a groan.

Netta gazed at him with curiosity. Why did *he* mind their going to Cyprus ? Was it fear for the climate, or what ? But, at all events, *she* was inclined to rejoice at leaving London and England. Her residence there had not been so very happy. In fact, she was only now recovering from the varied shocks that she had experienced in her native land, and her mind now went back with a glad rebound to the thought of the cheerful unclouded Lesbian days. Yet she felt she would miss something. Yes, she had made many pleasant acquaintances in England. What a pity, for example, that that garden group at Reigate could not be bodily transferred to their new home in the Levant !

Bob, from being merely plunged in black moodiness, became abnormally restless. He leaped from his seat, and began pacing to and fro. He declined altogether to congratulate Colonel Vane on his good fortune. It might be fun for the colonel, but to part from Netta was death to himself. He began wildly to ruminate over the possibility of planting a branch of Scotland Yard in Cyprus, and having

himself appointed as the head of it. Mrs. Betteridge soon noticed his perturbed mental condition.

"Bob," she said, in a pause in the general conversation, "is horribly restless. Just look at him, wandering about like the lion at the Zoological Gardens. Nothing will do him any good but a drive."

"A capital idea!" said Bob, stopping in his walk. "But nobody'll come." Then a very happy thought flashed across his mind. If he could persuade Staunton and the two Miss Vanes to come with him, he could leave Staunton and Mildred together somewhere, and then he *might*—his heart beat fast at the thought—he *might* have the opportunity, and, having it, he *might* summon up courage enough to use it, the opportunity to unburden his soul to the other Miss Vane; to tell her how he hated her going to Cyprus, how inconsolable he would be, and a number of other things besides.

In as natural a tone as he could assume, he proposed the drive—"only a short one"—and he was delighted to find that Mildred and her sister took to the idea at once. Netta actually said it was "very kind" of him to propose it. Staunton's acquiescence he counted on as a matter of course.

When the trap was brought round to the front of the house, Bob took Staunton aside for a moment, and said—

"Now, look here. I'm going to take you round by Leith Hill. But don't mention the name to the girls. They don't know the country about here, and we musn't breathe a word about Bastian's cottage, you know. We shan't pass very near the place, but I thought I'd warn you. Any mention of Maturin might upset Miss Netta Vane."

"All right," said Staunton.

And, with Mildred and her lover behind, and Netta mounted on the seat beside Bob, who held the reins, the party started, amid wavings of handkerchiefs from the group on the lawn. Mrs. Vane felt complete confidence in Bob's driving; the colonel would have trusted his daughters to anybody in his then state of beatitude over his appointment.

Every slight thing on this expedition seemed momentous and memorable to the gentleman driver. He remembered all the details for years afterwards—how, in passing through the little village of Buckland, there was a child asleep in a doorway; how at Betchworth Corner they met a few sheep and a solitary cow driven by a rustic; the fresh greenness of

the new foliage ; the crisp sharpness of the air, showing that winter had not yet really departed ; and, on nearing Dorking, how the bells of the parish church were ringing to an evening service.

Bob was a safe whip, and they bowled along the well-made road merrily. After Dorking they turned to the southward, and took the road which had led Dr. Maturin on a memorable morning up towards the furze-clad heights. How unconscious they all seemed of that past tragedy !

From being gay and general, the conversation at last settled down into a very earnest and whispered colloquy between the couple on the back seat, in which the couple in front did not appear to have any part or lot. So before long Netta was expatiating on the glories of Greece, and telling Bob all about Lesbos, and how she hoped her father would take them all to Cyprus, and how she wondered if it would be as delightful as Castro. Bob seemed singularly glum. Now and then he flicked the horse viciously.

"I hope you'll enjoy yourself away from England," at length he said. "*We* shall miss you." Another flick.

"Oh, we shall come back to England sometimes, I dare say"—in a light and careless tone, which almost broke Bob's heart ; "and then, perhaps, you will come to Cyprus and visit us. That would be so nice !"

"Well, for my part, I hope the colonel won't get this appointment at all," said Bob, summoning up all his deep dislike of the prospect of Netta's banishment into one almost savage outburst of opposition.

The girl looked quite grieved.

"Mr. Betteridge ! After he has waited so long for something ! How can you say that ?"

"I say," shouted Staunton in Bob's ear, before the latter could answer Netta's remonstrance. "We are just at the bottom of the hill. There's the tower. Shall we walk across the fields to the top ?"

Bob looked at his companion. It was already growing twilight.

"Would you like it, Miss Vane ?"

"Certainly," Netta answered, and jumped down. This was another disappointment to Bob. He hoped to have helped her. He felt exasperated with everything. He got down leisurely. As the others did not seem to care for him, *he would take his time.* He saw Staunton and the two girls

get over the stile and walk slowly along over the grass. They had left *him* to attend to the trap, just as if he were a confounded groom! He couldn't stand that, and shouted—

"Hi! What am I to do with this?"

Staunton stopped. So did the girls. Then the former, waking from an amorous reverie, shouted back—

"Oh, that cottage there! Somebody'll look after it."

Bob now noticed, about twenty yards ahead, a low wall with a square of glass in it. He found the door, summoned a laboring man, and, by the promise of a shilling, secured his attention to vehicle and horse. Then he began to follow the others up the hill. They had already gone across the first field, and were out of sight.

And this was the opportunity he had wished for! He felt that Fortune was using him in the shabbiest fashion. He began to step out quickly.

"Nothing venture, nothing have!" he said aloud and defiantly, as he vaulted over a low stile at the other end of the field. In so doing he almost came into collision with a female figure that was standing close to the hedge. He started back in surprise. The figure broke into a silvery laugh.

"Did you think I was a ghost, Mr. Betteridge?" it said.

A rush of happy feeling overpowered Bob's utterance for a moment. Before he could answer, Miss Netta Vane said in a different tone—

"I wanted to ask you what you meant? It seemed cruel what you said—that you wished papa had not got that appointment."

"I am very sorry if anything I say sounds cruel," Bob replied. "Perhaps I had better withdraw the unfortunate remark."

"It would be better to explain it," said Netta, simply.

"Then I will," said Bob, desperately. "You see, Miss Vane, you are all settled in England comfortably now. Aren't you? Then why should you leave it? Why should the colonel cut and run?" This was not exactly what Bob would have said if he had thought for a moment. He added, however, in a tone of genuine feeling, "You can't suppose I don't wish your father's welfare—and, indeed, the welfare of all of you?"

"No; I *do* believe that," said Netta, with corresponding cordiality in her voice. "And that was why your remark struck me as so strange, that I thought I would stay behind."

the others and ask you about it. I know," she went on rather hesitatingly—"at least, I heard about papa's debt, and how somebody very generously paid it off for him." She blushed deeply, but she had made up her mind to tell Bob that his good deed was known and appreciated. She at least would not let him think that the Vane family was ungrateful for kindness.

They had begun to walk leisurely up the sloping path, now lighted only by the fading sunlight and the first faint stars. But now Bob stopped, and asked—

"Who told you?"

"Ah!" said she, mischievously. "A swallow, perhaps. They say in Lesbos that the swallows tell all secrets. And it was very kind and generous indeed; and whoever it was is entitled to our gratitude forever. But I hope papa will repay him—I am sure he will."

"I hope not," said Bob. "I would rather have your words of gratitude, though I don't deserve them, than any money your father could give me. You see," he proceeded, a little alarmed at what he had said, "I take an interest in you—I mean I take an interest in Colonel Vane—in all your family, in fact."

Again Netta Vane's clear-toned laugh rang across the sleeping meadow.

"My father is much older than you are," she said. "You don't take the same interest in us—in Mildred and me, do you—that you take in him?"

The question was half serious, half roguish. It gave Bob the opportunity which he wanted.

"No; I don't," he said. "The fact is, Miss Vane, I take a far greater interest in one member of your family than in all the others put together. Can't you guess which that is? It would save me a lot of trouble." A pause. "It's yourself. Perhaps you will think it absurd in me—I hope not; I know I am unworthy in every way—but I can't help loving you, and I do love you from the bottom of my heart—I do indeed," said poor hesitating Bob, standing now on one side of the footpath, with the woman to whom he was addressing his passionate crudities on the other.

She, for her part, became at once quite solemn. In a moment she recalled another proposal which had been made to her, in the park near a certain house at Manor End. How different was *this* lover's language and manner! But it had

the stamp and the ring of genuineness about it—of that she could have no doubt. There was no cunning about Bob Betteridge, she felt. And the thought was unspeakably comforting to her soul. For a moment or two she stood silent, immersed in self-examination. *Did* she love now? She raised her head at length, and spoke out frankly and firmly, but in a very low voice.

"Yes," she said simply, placing her hand in his, while he drew her to himself and kissed her again and again; "I am sure you are a good man."

Poor little Netta! After her experience of Hartas Maturin, this was the one important point to be considered.

As for Bob, he was simply in an ecstasy of unexpected rapture. He caught the words, "You are a good man," and at once burst out—

"Oh! but that's not enough, Netta darling! Do you love me as I love you?"

"I can't tell," said she, smiling through happy tears. "How can I know how much you love me, Bob? But I *do* love you. And now you will come to Cyprus with us, and you will be glad papa is going there, will you not?"

Side by side with the lady of his love, he walked on up the hill. Could it be called walking? He seemed to be treading on air. He was exquisitely happy. It was not in vain that he had for years past been trying to do his duty in this life—that he had taken to serious occupations, and been a good son. He was amply repaid.

And as they wandered on, talking as lovers do, Netta felt constrained to pour into Bob's sympathetic ears the whole story of her dream or vision. What could it mean? she asked him.

Bob, at the end of her story, did not answer as she had expected. He caught up Dr. Maturin's name.

"Netta," he said, "I always thought I had no chance with you till my clever brother-in-law was out of the way. And, you see, I was right."

"Don't speak like that," she implored him. "You talk as if you were inferior to him."

"So I am; so I was—in cleverness."

"In nothing else, then," she replied resolutely. "And goodness is what makes the real value of everybody, I am sure."

For one thing Bob was profoundly thankful—that was,

that Netta herself did not seem to have formed any clear idea of why that dream had come to her. She had not, at any rate, accepted the ghoulish re-incarnation theory in her own case. They talked, indeed, of that and of Bastian's ideas generally.

"Bastian ought not to have put such theories in your head," he said.

"But you admire him too?" she asked.

"Of course I do. He's a splendid fellow. But it doesn't follow that all his notions are right."

"How can I account for the effect my dream had on—on Dr. Maturin, when I told it him?"

"I don't know," said Bob; "I can't account for it. He saw you were angry with him, and that would have an effect on any fellow, I should think, Netta!"

She laughed, and said with a sigh—

"You are like all men, you turn aside from difficult questions—all, except Mr. Bastian."

"And he gives the wrong answer," Bob observed sagely.

There was the tower looming black before them now, and on the grassy plateau on which it stood the forms of Staunton and Mildred stood out clearly against the sky. But there was surely a third figure, too—the figure of a tall man, who was talking to the other two.

Netta caught tightly hold of Bob's arm. She had not yet recovered from the shock of Dr. Maturin's death.

"Bob," she whispered, "This is Leith Hill. I heard Mr. Staunton say so. Are we anywhere near where—where *he* died?"

"Anywhere near?" said Bob, in that loud, matter-of-fact tone best suited to still imaginary terrors. "Not a bit of it. Twenty miles away."

"Ah!" said she, with a little sigh of satisfaction; "I am so glad." (Let us hope Bob will be forgiven for that innocent deception.) "But who can that man be?"

The mystery was soon resolved. For, on advancing a little closer, the unmistakable firm tones of Bastian's voice were wafted to the ears of the approaching couple. Bob, knowing the effect his words had had before on Netta, was not at all pleased at the encounter.

"Now darling," he said holding her gently back, "don't let him frighten you. He's not infallible, you know."

"Bob," she replied, with excitement in her tones, "I must ask him one question;" and she ran forward.

"Something about me, I'll be bound," thought Bob to himself. He did not believe that anybody could alienate Netta from him now. "If he tries to do it, I shall have to punch his head," Bob ruminated, with regret.

Whatever the question might have been, the oracle's answer must have been satisfactory, for when Bob reached the group, Bastian at once said—

"Here is my friend Robert Betteridge. I see no obstacle of a spiritual kind to his marriage with this young lady; and I heartily wish him joy."

Mildred and Staunton looked at Netta and Bob with voiceless surprise for a moment.

"Is it true, Netta?" her sister asked.

"Yes, dear," she quietly answered; "quite true;" and again she placed her hand in Bob's.

"Well," said Staunton, after he had offered his congratulations, "this is a night of surprises. Here is Mr. Bastian, suddenly springing up apparently from the earth, unless he was hiding in the tower, which is unlikely."

"I live not far from here. My cottage has been rebuilt. And a moonlight ramble on these hills is one of my delights."

Bob was now making frantic signs to Bastian to keep off dangerous topics. Netta saw it, guessed the motive, and at once said—

"I am not nervous or terrified now. I have not seen Mr. Bastian since that day that Dr. Maturin and I went to his rooms in the East End. Ever since, I have longed to know what he would say about—about my vision, and all the dreadful events that have taken place."

"I must first know what the vision you mention was."

Bob hastily broke in with "Oh, it was only a dream," and proceeded to sketch it in bald outline, with the kindly desire to spare Netta the mental trouble of repeating it. It certainly did not gain in picturesqueness from Bob's way of telling it; but then, it also lost some of its horrors.

Bastian at the end was silent for a time. Then he said—

"I will tell you in few words what I think. It would be easy for me to say at once that the explanation of this vision is certain. I never dogmatize, however, when I don't know. I am sure that this young lady's spirit"—here he pointed to Netta Vane—"has lived before, like all our spirits; I am

sure that, either in that pre-mundane state or here on earth, it had entered into some relations of enmity with the soul of Maturin, and that there was in consequence a dark gulf placed between them; but I do not pretend to any knowledge at all of what particular body it occupied, or, indeed, which of many planets was its home. For that sort of confident dogmatism without knowledge I refer you to ordinary impostors, men who trade on credulity. What I say is this—the vision does not necessarily mean that the spirit of Dr. Maturin's dead wife passed into the body of Janet Vane at birth." (Poor Netta clasped her hands as if in fervent relief!) "It may be so or not. Very likely it is so. But, in another way, it is a strong confirmation of my belief. For, unless by conversing with the departed spirit in another world, how could this lady's soul come to have the knowledge which it undoubtedly possessed? You may try to account for it on other theories. Mine is the true one. What is the solution that finds favor in your eyes, Staunton?" he said, suddenly turning round on the able lawyer.

"I would not venture an off-hand opinion," said that prudent soul. "But Miss Netta Vane may have been told things by friends; she may have heard things from servants, which she has forgotten; then she may herself have begun to distrust Dr. Maturin. And at a time of great shock she would naturally piece it all together into a connected story."

"And how do *you* explain it, Bob?"

"I don't," said Bob. "I simply say your explanation about spirits is wrong, in my humble opinion."

"But you must have some notion about it."

"Well, if Maturin *was* really a murderer, which isn't proved, then I think you might explain it in this way. I was reading a story the other day of a curious thing which happened years ago, when Napoleon was going to invade England. He had no end of troops at Boulogne, you know. One of his soldiers in a tent shot himself. Another man was put in, and he did the same. Napoleon heard of it, and ordered the tent to be thoroughly cleaned, scoured, and re-decorated; but it was placed again in the same spot. Then there was a third suicide in it. After that nobody would use the tent, and it was burnt, and, what's more, the piece of ground was railed round, and no other tent erected there. Well, the book in which I read that said that there might be an atmosphere hanging about the places where crimes had

been committed which affected other people afterwards, don't you see? In the same way, I thought it might be possible that when Netta slept in that room at Maturin's, where his wife died, there might be a kind of—er—spiritual contagion hanging about the walls which might make her dream of the death, and might even reveal to her how it all happened."

This was an unusually long speech for Bob. At the end he panted. Staunton clapped him on the shoulders, and said it was the best explanation he had heard yet.

"Yes," said Bastian, "it is ingenious. But it has this objection. It clears up one mystery by inventing another. Now, my doctrine of re-incarnation makes all things plain. It leaves no corners dark. It explains why there is evil in the world. It justifies the ways of God to man, instead of leaving it all a hideous mystery, as the popular creed leaves it. It does what no other creed does—it makes God both merciful and just. And, after all, the existence of imposture is no proof that 'spiritualism' is not in the main correct. Look at all the quacks who have fastened themselves on electricity, and pretend to heal diseases by its means; yet there *is* such a thing as electricity, I think. The telegraph is a fact, is it not? In all departments of knowledge and thought, in medicine, in art, in science, in religion, impostors and money-seekers will flourish, and do flourish now. What we have to do is to raise ourselves to such a height that we can separate the false from the true. Scientific men are now beginning to say that the fact of a soul can be demonstrated, and that its after-existence is scientifically probable. Yet they don't believe in special creations, and they ought therefore to believe equally in the soul's pre-existence. Book-learning is nothing, external revelation is nothing, authority is nothing. Purify the soul, and then question it, and you will find an answer to all doubts, a solution of every mystery!"

"Will you walk down the hill with us, Bastian?" Staunton asked.

"I prefer the top," said he.

And so they parted.

And for the journey home it was impossible to keep Bob serious for a moment. He refused to believe in any of Bastian's theories. Or he would believe them all, if Netta wished. He only knew he owed Bastian a good deal, he said. He had been his good angel. But he was going to

dismiss him from the post, and take another sort of angel. He was going to settle in Cyprus. He was going to be the special correspondent of Scotland Yard in the Mediterranean. He would moor himself out in the middle of the Levant, and prevent swindlers escaping to the East. He would also grow grapes and oranges, and make a fortune. Did Netta believe in the Greeks? Then Bob would too. He would suppress his personal inclination towards regarding them as the greatest thieves and rogues in existence. Here Staunton broke in with his matter-of-fact remarks.

"They're certainly expert swindlers, Greeks. I go in for commercial cases, and for rascally dodges your Greek trader is A one. I knew a Greek merchant who sold an Englishman an island, 'with a substantial house'—so he described it—and covered with olives, vines, corn, etc., and when the Englishman got there, he found a wooden shanty unfit for cattle to live in—that was the substantial house—and a few olives and vines just planted!"

"But they *were* a noble race once," said Mildred, shocked.

"And some of them are noble now," said Netta, who would not give up her belief in the people among whom her happiest days had been spent.

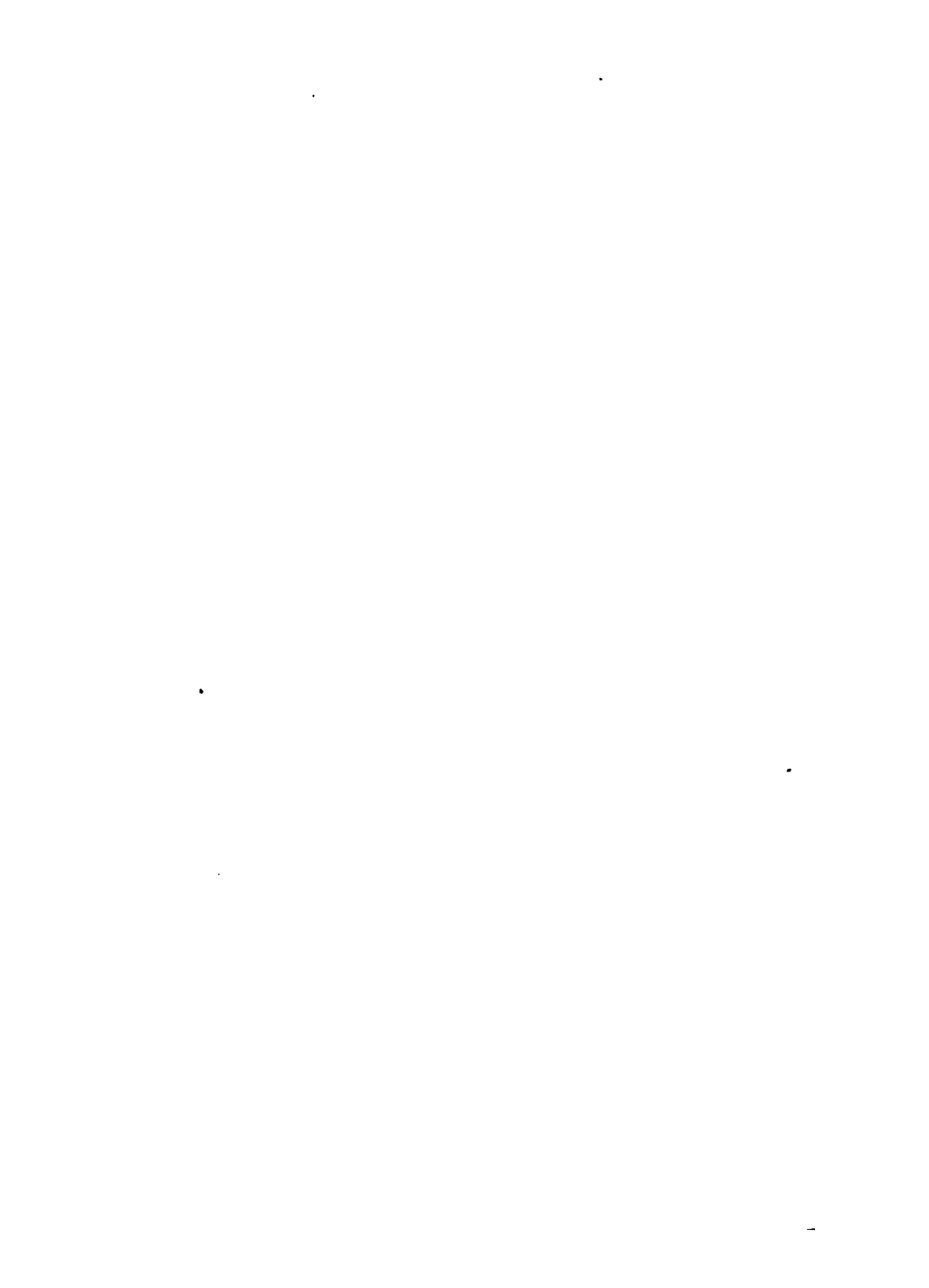
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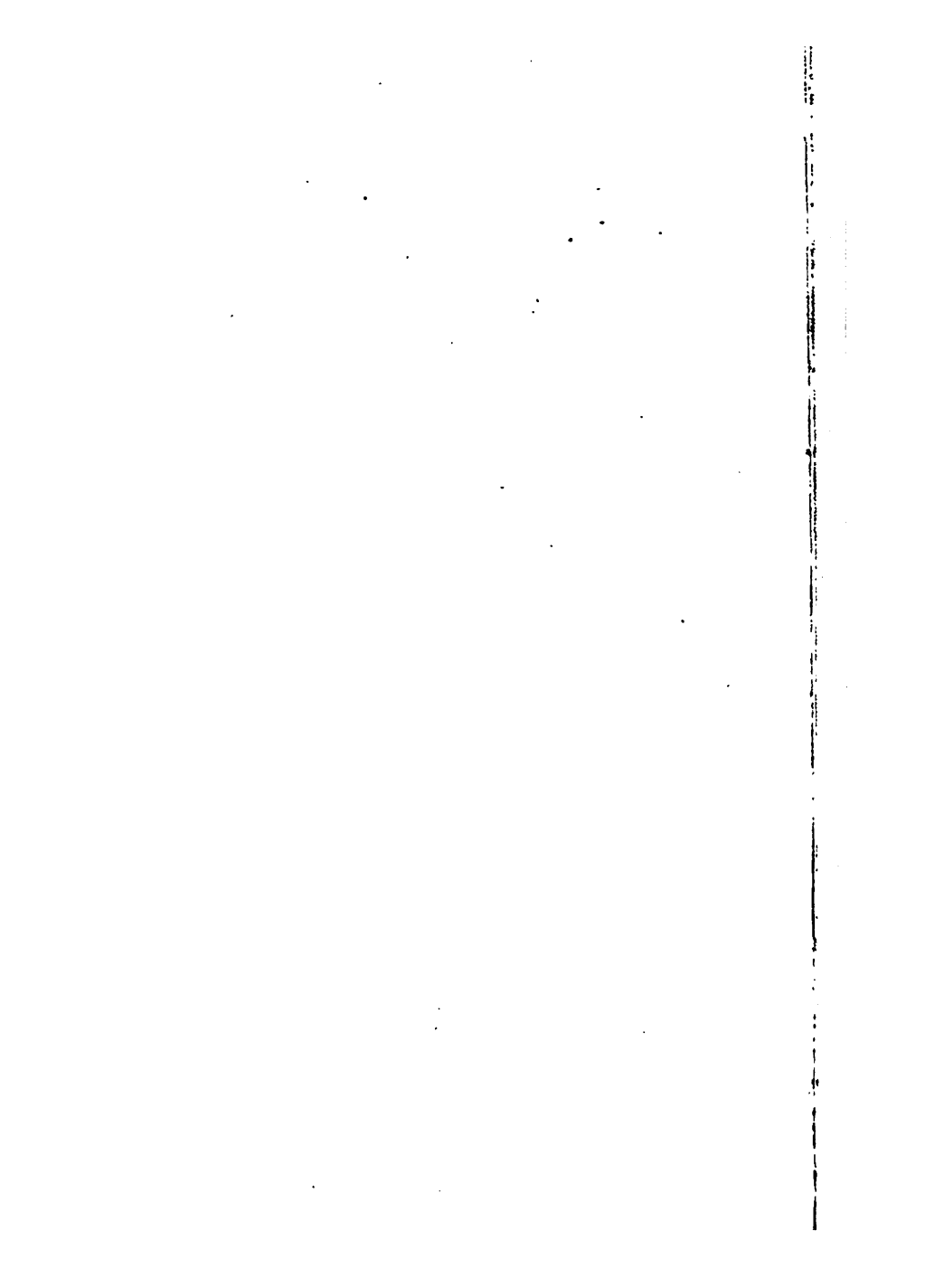
Colonel Vane went to Cyprus, but he left his family behind him. And every winter for several years they made it a practice to spend four or five months on the hills above Larnaca. And when Bob and Netta went to Lesbos, on a pleasure trip, soon after their marriage, they found Mr. Thesmophorus a bachelor still. This struck Bob as such a melancholy fact, that he invited the worthy Greek to visit them in England. Mr. Thesmophorus sadly declined, and shortly afterwards left Lesbos for good, and settled near Constantinople, cherishing to the end of his days a romantic attachment to the beautiful English girl that had once lived on his native island.

Mr. Bastian was not a man whose light could be hidden under any bushel yet constructed, and of him and his labors and his ideas the world is certain in good time to hear more.

THE END.

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